The Lady of Lynn

Walter Besant

Bacon

12/6

THE LADY OF LYNN

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'WHAT HAVE YOU TO DO WITH THE GIRL?' [p. 178.

THE

LADY OF LYNN

BY

WALTER BESANT

AUTHOR OF

'ALL SORTS AND CONDITIONS OF MEN,' 'THE ORANGE GIRL,' ETC.

WITH TWELVE ILLUSTRATIONS BY G. DEMAIN-HAMMOND

LONDON

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1901

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THE LADY OF LYNN

PROLOGUE

PROMOTION AND A BASTING

The happiest day of my life, up to that time, because I should be the basest and the most ungrateful of men were I not to confess that I have since enjoyed many days far excelling in happiness that day, was the 20th day of June in the year of Grace seventeen hundred and forty-seven.

For on that day, being my nineteenth birthday, I was promoted, though so young, to be mate or chief officer on board my ship, the *Lady of Lynn*, Captain Jaggard, then engaged in the Lisbon trade.

In the forenoon of that day I was on board and on duty. We were taking in our cargo. Barges and lighters were alongside, and all the crew with the bargees were hoisting and heaving and lowering and stowing with a grand yohoing and chanting, such as is common, with oaths innumerable, in the lading and the unlading of a ship. It was my duty to see the casks and crates hoisted aboard and lowered into the hold. The supercargo and the clerk from the counting-house sat at a table on deck, and entered in their books every cask, box, chest or bale. We took aboard and carried away for the use of the Portingals, or any whom it might

concern, turpentine, tar, resin, wool, pig iron, and other commodities brought by our ships from the Baltic or carried in barges down the river to the Port of Lynn. These were the things which we took out—what we brought home was wine; nothing but wine; barrels, tuns, pipes, hogsheads, casks of all kinds, containing wine. There would be in our hold wine of Malmsey, Madeira, Teneriffe, Canary, Alicante, Xeres, Oporto, Bucellas, and Lisbon; all the wines of Spain and Portugal; the sweet, strong wines to which our people are most inclined, especially our people of Norfolk, Marshland, Fenland, Lincoln, and the parts around. Thanks to the Port of Lynn and to the ships of Lynn engaged in the Lisbon trade, there is no place in England where this sweet, strong wine can be procured better or at a more reasonable rate. This wine is truly beloved of all classes; it is the joy of the foxhunter after the day's run; of the justices after the ordinary on market-day; of the Fellows in their dull, old colleges at Cambridge; of the Dean and Chapter in the sleepy Cathedral close; of the country clergy and the country gentry—yea, and of the ladies when they visit each other. I say nothing in dispraise of Rhenish and of Bordeaux, but give me the wine that comes home in the bottoms that sail to and from Lisbon. All wine is good, but that is best which warms the heart and strengthens the body and renews the courage —the wine of Spain and Portugal.

The *Lady of Lynn* was a three-masted, full-rigged ship of 380 tons, a stout and strong-built craft, not afraid of the Bay at its worst and wildest, making her six knots an hour with a favourable breeze, therefore not one of your broad, slow Dutch merchantmen, which creep slowly, like Noah's ark, over the face of the waters. Yet she was full in the beam, and capacious in the hold; the more you put into her the steadier she sat and the steadier she sailed.

Man and boy I sailed in the *Lady of Lynn* for twenty-five years, and I ought to know. We made, for the most part, two, but sometimes three, voyages in the year, unless we experienced bad weather, and had to go into dock. Bad weather there is in plenty; storms and chopping winds in the Bay, beating up the Channel against east winds. Things are always uncertain in the North Sea. Sometimes the ship will be tacking day after day, getting a knot or two in four-and-twenty hours, and sometimes she will be two or three weeks crossing the Wash, which, as everybody knows, is cumbered with shallows, and making way up the Ouse, where a wind from the south or south-east will keep a ship from reaching her port for days together. To be sure, a sailor pays very little heed to the loss of a few days. It matters little to him whether he is working on board or in port. He is a patient creature, who waits all his life upon a favourable breeze. And since he has no power over the wind and the sea, he accepts whatever comes without murmuring, and makes the best of it. Perhaps the wind blows up into a gale, and the gale into a storm—perhaps the good ship founders with all hands—nobody pities the sailor—it is all in the day's work—young or old, everyone must die—the wife at home knows that, as well as the man at sea. She knew it when she married her husband. I have read of Turks and pagan Mohammedans that they have no fear or care about the future, believing that they cannot change what is predestined. It seems to me a foolish doctrine, because if we want anything we must work for it, or we shall not get it, fate or no fate. But the nearest to the Turks in this respect is our English sailor, who will work his hardest in the worst gale that ever blew, and face death without a pang, or a prayer, or a touch of fear, because he trusted his life to the sea and the wind, and he has no power to control the mounting waves or the

roaring tempest. It is as if one should say: 'I make a bargain with the ocean, and with all seas that threaten and every wind that blows. I say to them, "Suffer me to make my living on a ship that you winds blow across the seas, and in return I will give you myself and the ship and the cargo—all your own—to take, if you please and whenever you please."' It is a covenant between them. Sometimes the sailor gets the best of it, and spends his old age on dry land, safe after many voyages; sometimes he gets the worst of it, and is taken, ship and all, when he is quite young. He cannot complain. He has made the bargain, and must hold to it. But if one could sweep the bed of the ocean and recover among the tangled seaweed and the long sea serpents and monsters the treasures that lie scattered about, how rich the world would be! Perhaps (but this is idle talk) the sea might some day say: 'I am gorged with the things that mankind call riches. My floor is strewn thick with ribs of ships and skeletons of men, with chests of treasures, bales and casks and cargoes. I have enough. Henceforth there shall be no more storms, and the ships shall pass to and fro over a deep of untroubled blue, with a surface like unto a polished mirror!' Idle talk! And who would be a sailor then? We should hand the ships over to the women, and apprentice our girls to the trade of setting sails of silk with ropes of ribbons.

I will tell you presently how I was so fortunate as to be apprenticed to so fine a craft as the *Lady of Lynn*. Just now it is enough to set down that she was the finest vessel in the little fleet of ships belonging to my young mistress, Molly Miller, ward of Captain Crowle. There were eight ships, all her own—the *Lady of Lynn*, the ship in which I served my apprenticeship; the *Jolly Miller*, named after her father; the *Lovely Molly*, after herself; the *Joseph and Catherine*,

after her parents; the *Pride of Lynn*, the *Glory of Lynn*, the *Beauty of Lynn*, and the *Honour of Lynn*, which you may take, if you like, as named after their owner. Molly owned them all.

I have to tell you, however, in this place, why one day in especial must ever be remembered by me as the most surprising and the happiest that I had ever known.

I was on the quarter-deck on duty when the boy came up the companion saying that the Captain wanted to speak to me. So I followed, little thinking of what he had to say, expecting no more than some question about log or cargo, such as the skipper is always putting to his officers.

In the Captain's cabin, however, I found sitting at the table not only Captain Jaggard himself, but my old friend and patron Captain Crowle. His jolly face was full of satisfaction and good-humour, so that it gave one pleasure only to look at him. But he sat upright, and assumed the air of dignity which spoke of the quarter-deck. A man who has walked that part of the ship in command doth never lose the look of authority.

'John Pentecrosse,' he began, 'I have sent for you in order to inform you that, on the recommendation of Captain Jaggard here'—Captain Jaggard gravely inclined his head in acquiescence—'and with the consent of Miss Molly, sole proprietor of this good ship, the *Lady of Lynn*, I have promoted you to the rank of chief officer.'

'Sir!' I cried, overwhelmed, for, indeed, I had no reason to expect this promotion for another two or three years, 'what can I say?'

'We don't want you to say anything, Jack, my lad.' The Captain came down from the quarter-deck and became my old friend again. 'Give me your hand. You're young, but there's never a better sailor afloat, is there, Captain Jaggard?'

'None, Captain Crowle; none, for his years.'

'For his years, naturally. He's salt through and through, isn't he, Captain Jaggard?'

'And through, Captain Crowle.' My skipper was a man of grave aspect and few words.

'Well, then, let us drink the lad's health.' And upon that the cabin-boy, who needed no further order, dived into the locker, produced a bottle, opened it, and placed three glasses.

'No better Lisbon,' said Captain Jaggard, pouring it out, 'goes even to the table of the King—God bless him!'

'Now, gentlemen,' Captain Crowle pushed a glass to me, 'first a glass to Miss Molly, my little maid. Jack, you've been her playfellow and you're now her servant.'

'I could ask nothing better, Sir.'

'I know, a good and zealous servant. Drink it off, a full glass, running over, to Molly Miller.'

I obeyed, nothing loath.

'And now, Captain Jaggard, here's the health of your new mate—long to serve under you—your right hand—your eyes open when you are off the deck—your sailing master—the keeper of your log—Jack Pentecrosse, I drink to your good luck.'

* * * * *

That was the event which made this day the happiest in my life. Another event, of which I thought little at the time, was more important still in the after-consequences. This was the humiliation of Sam Semple.

In the evening, as soon as I could get ashore, I repaired, as in duty bound, to pay my respects to my young mistress. She lived, being Captain Crowle's ward, in his house, which was the old house with a tower, formerly built for some religious purpose. It stands retired from the street with a fair garden in front, a garden where I had played many

SHE GAVE ME HER HAND.

hundreds of times with Molly when we were boy and girl together.

This evening she was sitting in the summer-house, with some needlework. Beside her sat her good old black woman, Nigra.

'Jack!' she dropped her work and jumped up to meet me. 'I thought you would come this evening. Oh! are you pleased?'

'You knew I should come, Molly. Why, have I not to thank you for my promotion?'

She gave me her hand with her sweet frankness and her smiling face.

'I would make you Captain, Jack, but my guardian will not hear of it. All in good time, though. I am only waiting. I am proud of you, Jack, because everybody speaks so well of you. I met your father this morning and gave him the good news to rejoice his good old heart. He was too proud to confess his joy. But we know him, don't we, Jack? Well, I confess that I shall not be happy till you are Captain Pentecrosse, with a share in every cargo.'

'Nay, Molly, the ship is yours, and I am but your servant—though a proud and joyful servant.'

She shook her head. 'All you brave fellows,' she said, 'are going out to sea in storm and tempest to work for me. Why should all these ships bring riches to me? I have done nothing. They ought to bring riches for those who work.' That shows her tenderness of heart. Never have I heard of any other woman who complained that her servants worked to make her rich while she did nothing. Yet the Vicar would rebuke her, saying that riches and increase were the gifts of Providence, and that she must accept the gifts plainly intended by Heaven. And Captain Crowle spoke to the same effect, and my father, the school-

master, also pointed out that in the Divine scheme there were rich and there were poor; the former for an example and for an encouragement to industry; the latter for the virtues of duty, discipline, and contentment—things pleasing in the eyes of the Lord. But still she returned to her talk about the people who worked for her.

And then we sat and talked while Nigra went on with her work, sitting at the feet of her mistress, whom she watched all the time as a dog keeps one eye always upon his master.

At this time my mistress, as I have said, was past sixteen years of age, a time when many girls are already married. But she was still a child, or a young girl, at heart, being one of those who, like a fine Orleans plum, ripen slowly, and are all the better for the time they take. In person, if I may speak of what should be sacred, she was finely made, somewhat taller than the average, her hair of that fair colour which is the chief glory of the English maiden. Lord! If a Lisbon girl could show that fair hair with those blue eyes, and that soft cheek, touched with the ruddy hue and the velvet bloom of the September peach, she would draw after her the whole town, with the King and his court, and even the Grand Inquisitor and his accursed crew of torturers. I know not how she was dressed, but it was in simple fashion. Though so great an heiress she went to church no more finely dressed than any of the girls belonging to the better sort, save for a substantial gold chain which had been her father's. And this she always wore about her neck.

She was of a truly affectionate disposition, her mind being as lovely as her face. In manners she was easy and compliant; in discourse, sometimes grave and sometimes merry. As for her great possessions, she was so simple in her tastes and habits, being in all respects like the

daughter of a plain merchantman's skipper, that she understood little or nothing of what these possessions meant, or what they might bestow upon her. She was, in a word, a plain and unaffected damsel, with no pretence of anything superior to those around her. She was skilled in all household matters, although so well read; she could brew and pickle, and make perfumes and cordials for the still-room; she could make cakes and puddings; she knew how to carve at table; she had her poultry, her ducks, her pigs and her dairy, in the fields within the walls hard by the Lady's Mount. She was always busy, and therefore never afflicted with the vapours or the spleen or the longing for one knows not what which afflict the empty mind of the idle and the fashionable dame. There were other good and comely girls in King's Lynn. I might perhaps—I say it not with boastfulness—have married Victory, daughter of the Reverend Ellis Hayes, Curate of St. Nicholas. She was a buxom wench enough and notable housewife. Or I might have married Amanda, daughter of Dr. Worship, our physician — she who married Tom Rising, and when he broke his neck hunting the fox, afterwards married the Vicar of Hunstanton. She, too, was a fine woman, though something hard of aspect. But there was never, for me, any other woman in the world than Molly, my mistress.

No one, however, must believe that there was any thought or discourse concerning love between us. I had been her companion and playfellow; I knew her very mind, and could tell at any time of what she was thinking. Sometimes her thoughts were of high and serious things, such as were inspired by the sermon; mostly they were of things simple, such as the prospects of the last brew or the success of the latest cordial. Of suitors she had none, although she was now, as I said, sixteen. There were no suitors. I very well know why, because, perhaps for

friendly reasons, Captain Crowle had told me something of his ambition for his ward. She was too rich and too good for the young men of Lynn—what would any of them do with such an heiress? She was too rich and too good even for the gentlefolk of the county, a hearty, rough, good-natured people, who hunted and shot and feasted and drank—what would they do with an heiress of wealth beyond their highest hopes—had they any knowledge of her wealth? But I believe that they had none. No one knew the truth except the Captain. The girl was intended by her guardian for some great man; he knew not, as yet, how he should find this great man; but he knew that there were very few even of the noble lords in the House of Peers whose fortune or whose income would compare with that of his ward—his little maid. And I, who knew this ambition, knew also that I was trusted not to betray confidence nor to disturb the girl's mind by any talk of love. Now, the mind of a young maid piously disposed is like the surface of a calm sea, which looks up to the sky and reflects the Blue of Heaven, undisturbed; till Dan Cupid comes along and agitates the calm with the reflection of some shepherd swain, and ripples the surface with new thoughts which are allowed by Heaven, but belong not to any of its Many Mansions.

Therefore we talked of everything except love; of the Portugals and their people, and their horrid Inquisition; of the yarns told by sailors about the places they have seen; and so forth. There was no talk about books, because there were no books. A ready reckoner, a manual of navigation, Moll's geography, a wages book, the Bible, and the Book of Common Prayer, were the only books belonging to the good old Captain. Nor in all Lynn, save for the learned shelves of the Vicar and the Curate of St. Nicholas, are there any books. It is not a town

which reads or asks for books. Why, even on market-days you will not see any stall for the sale of books such as may be seen every week at Cambridge and at Norwich, and even at Bury St. Edmund's. 'Tis, perhaps, a pity that so many gentlemen, substantial merchants, and sea-captains never read books. For their knowledge of the outer world and the nations they trust to the sailors, who, to tell the truth, know as much as any books can tell them. But sailors are not always truthful. For their wisdom and their conduct of life and manners these honest merchants depend upon the Old and the New Testament; or, since there are some who neglect that treasury of Divine knowledge, they trust to mere tradition and to proverbs, to the continuation of their forefathers' habits and to the memory of what their forefathers achieved.

The sun went down as we sat talking. The sun went down and the soft twilight of June, the month which most I love, because there is no darkness, and a man on watch can discern ahead breakers and ships as well as the vast circle of the rolling sea, fell upon us, and then Nigra gathered her work together and arose.

'Come to supper, honey,' she said. 'Come, Massa Jack,' and led the way.

I have often, since I learned and understood things, wondered at the simplicity with which Molly's guardian thought it proper to bring up this young heiress, whose hand he intended for some great personage as yet unknown. He lived, for choice, in a small parlour overlooking his neighbour's garden; it was nearly as narrow as the cabin to which he was accustomed. His fare was that which, as a sailor, he considered luxurious. The staple, so to speak, was salt beef or salt pork, but not quite so hard as that of the ship's barrels. This evening, for instance, we sat down to a supper consisting of a piece of cold boiled beef, somewhat

underdone; there was a cold chicken, a salad of lettuce, spring onions, and fresh radishes, and a gooseberry pie afterwards, with plenty of strong brown sugar. With these dainties was served a jug of home-brewed—to my mind a more delicious drink than any of the wine brought home by the *Lady of Lynn*. I remember now how it stood beside the Captain, with its noble head of froth overtopping the brown jug in which it was drawn.

It had been a joyful day. It was destined to conclude with an event neither joyful nor sorrowful—an act of justice. For my own part, I could have sung and laughed all through the supper; the more joyful because Molly looked happy in my happiness. But there was something wrong. When we talked and laughed the Captain laughed with us, but not mirthfully. His face indicated a change of weather, just as in the bay, before a storm, the waters grow turbid, and I observed also that Molly's mother, though she laughed with Molly and applauded our sallies, glanced anxiously from time to time at the Captain, who was her cousin as well as her child's guardian. And I knew not what to make of these symptoms, because in the midst of fine weather, with an open sea, a fine sky, and a favouring breeze, one does not expect the signs of head-winds and driving sleet. What it meant you shall learn, and why I have said that the day was memorable for two reasons.

Supper over, the Captain, instead of turning round his chair to the fireplace, filling his pipe, and calling for another glass of October, as was expected, pushed back his chair and rose with dignity.

'Jennifer,' he addressed Molly's mother, 'the Persuader.'

'Jennifer,' was Mrs. Miller's Christian name. She got up and drew from the corner by the cupboard a stout crab-tree cudgel, twisted and gnarled like the old tree from which it came. 'Be not revengeful, John,' she said.

'No, no. I am a Justice of the Peace. I am Captain on my own quarter-deck. Punishment I shall bestow—not revenge.'

'Well, John. But he is young and you are old.'

Captain Crowle laughed. 'Young, is he? And I am old, am I? We shall see.'

Someone was going to be tried, judged, found guilty, sentenced, and to receive his sentence at once. The thing was not unusual in the house of a Justice of the Peace.

'Come with me, Jack. It shall not be said that I inflicted this punishment without a witness. All the world shall know about it, if so be the culprit desires. Come with me; Jennifer, keep within, and if you hear groans, praise the Lord for the correction of a sinner.'

Greatly marvelling, I followed the Captain as he marched out of the parlour. Arrived at the garden he looked round. 'So!' he said, 'he has not yet come. Perhaps it is light enough for you to read some of his pernicious stuff.' With that he put his hand into his pocket and drew forth a paper. 'Read that, Jack, I say; read it.'

I obeyed; the twilight gave sufficient light for reading the manuscript. Besides, the writing was large and in bold characters. 'Why,' I said, 'I know this writing. It is Sam Semple's.'

'Very good. Go on, therefore.'

At the very first words I understood what had already happened, and guessed, pretty well, what was going to happen:

> 'Molly divine! Thy heavenly charms prevail,
> As when the sun doth rise stars fade and pale.'

'No need for much more of the rubbish, Jack. Read the last of it. I read it all, and it made me sick.'

> 'So, matchless maid, thy silence grants consent.
> See, at thy feet, the poet's knee is bent—

When evening roses scatter fragrance faint,
And the sad Philomel renews his plaint.'

'Did ever man hear such stuff, Jack? Go on.'

'Within this bow'r afar from sight of men,
To-morrow, Wednesday, at the hour of ten,
That bow'r a shrine of Love and Temple fair,
I will await thee—Samuel Semple—there.'

'What do you think of that, Jack? Samuel Semple! The ragged, skulking, snivelling, impudent son of a thieving Exciseman! A very fine lover for my little maid! He! Will he? Will he?' The Captain grasped his cudgel with resolution.

'Sir,' I said with submission, 'what did Molly say to this precious epistle?'

'Molly? Dost think that I would let the little maid see such ranting stuff? Not so. The black woman brought the precious letters to me. There are three of them. Wait, Jack, thou shalt see. Hush! I hear his step. Let us get into the summer-house and lie snug to see what happens.'

We stepped into the summer-house, now pretty dark, and waited expectant.

Like the Captain, I was filled with amazement that Samuel, whom I knew well, who was my schoolfellow, should presume to lift his eyes so high. Alas! There is no bound or limit, I am assured, to the presumption of such as this stringer of foolish rhymes. Yet I felt some compunction for him, because he would most assuredly receive a basting such as would cure him effectually of the passion called love, so far as this object was concerned.

Presently we heard footsteps crunching the gravel. 'Snug, my lad. Lie snug,' whispered the Captain. We heard the steps making their way along the path between the gooseberry and currant bushes. Then they came out

upon the grass lawn before the summer-house. 'The grass is as big as a quarter-deck, Jack,' said the Captain. 'I've knocked down many a mutinous dog on the quarter-deck. 'Twill serve for the basting of a measly clerk.'

The poet came to the summer-house, and stood outside irresolute. He could not see the two occupants. He hemmed twice aloud. There was no reply. 'Matchless Molly!' he whispered. 'Divine maid! I am here at thy feet. Nymph of the azure sea, I am here.'

'The devil you are!' cried the Captain, stepping out. 'Why, here is a precious villain for you! Jack, cut him off in the rear if he tries to get away. So-so, my young quill-driver. You would poach on the preserves of your betters, would you? Would you? Would you?' At each repetition he banged the wooden post of the summer-house with his cudgel.

The poet made no reply, but he looked to right and to left and behind him for a way of escape, but found none, for I was ready to bar his flight. Wherefore his shoulders became rounded and his head hung down, and his knees trembled. Samuel Semple was caught in a trap. Some young fellows would have made a fight of it. But not Samuel; all he thought about was submission and non-resistance, which might provoke pity.

'Three times, jackanapes, hast thou presumed to send stuff to my ward. Here they are.' He took from me the last sheet of doggerel verse and drew from his pocket two more. 'Here they are—one—two—three—all addressed to the matchless Molly. Why, thou impudent villain—what devil prompted thee to call her matchless Molly? Matchless to such as you! Take that, Sirrah, and that.' They were laid on with a will. The poet groaned, but made no reply—again looking vainly to right and left for some way of escape.

'Now, Sir,' said the Captain, 'before we go on to the serious business, thou wilt eat this precious stuff—eat it—swallow it all—or, by the Lord!' again he raised the cudgel, 'I will stuff it down thy throat.'

'Oh! Captain Crowle,' he murmured, 'I will eat it—I will eat it.'

The poet took the papers. They were dry eating, and, I fear, tasteless, but in a few minutes he had swallowed them all.

'They are down?' said the Captain. 'Now comes the basting. And I would have you to understand, lump of impudence, that it is my mercy only—my foolish mercy, perhaps—that keeps me from sending you through the town at the tail of a cart. Kneel down, Sir, in token of repentance. What? I say—kneel down.'

The basting which followed was really worthy of the days when Captain Crowle, with his own hand, quelled a mutiny and drove the whole crew under hatches. The right hand at seventy was as vigorous as at forty. For my own part I attempted no interference. The Captain was wrathful, but he had command of himself. If he added to the basting a running commentary of seagoing terms signifying scorn and contempt, with the astonishment with which a sailor always regards presumption, it was only to increase the terror and the effect of the cudgelling. I am quite certain that he was resolved in his own mind when he should stop; that is to say, when the justice of the case should have been met and revenge would begin. And I hold myself excused for not preventing any portion of this commentary.

It was a poor, shrinking, trembling figure, full of bruises and aches and pains, that presently arose and slunk away. I should have felt sorry for him had he taken punishment like a man. Why, I would maroon any of my crew who

would cry and grovel and snivel when tied up for his three dozen. It made one sick and ashamed to see him and to hear him.

'Mercy, Captain! Oh! enough, good Captain! Oh, Captain, I confess. I deserve it all. Never again, Captain! Oh! forgiveness—forgiveness!' And so on. I say, it made me sick and ashamed. When all was over I followed him to the garden gate. 'Oh! Jack,' he groaned, 'you stood by and saw it all. I am a dead man. He shall be hanged for it. You are the witness. I am nothing but a bag of broken bones—ribs and collar-bones and skull. I am a poor unfortunate murdered man. I am done to death with a cudgel.'

'Go home,' I said. 'You a man? You cry like a whipped cur. Murdered? Not you. Cudgelled you are, and well you deserved it. Go home and get brown paper and vinegar, and tell all the town how you have been cudgelled for writing verses to your matchless maid. They will laugh, Sam Semple. They will laugh.'

The Captain went back to the parlour, somewhat flushed with the exercise.

'Justice,' he said, 'has been done, without the cart and the cat. My pipe, Jennifer, and the home-brewed. Molly, my dear, your very good health.'

A day or two afterwards we heard that Sam Semple had gone to London to make his fortune. He was carried thither in the waggon that once a week makes the journey to London, returning the following week. But when Sam Semple came back it was in a chaise, with much splendour, as in due course you shall hear. You shall also hear of the singular gratitude with which he repaid the Captain for that wholesome correction.

CHAPTER I

MY LORD'S LEVÉE

It is three years later. We are now in the year 1750.

At twelve o'clock in the morning the anteroom of the town-house of the Right Honourable the Earl of Fylingdale was tolerably filled with a mixed company attending his levée. Some were standing at the windows; some were sitting; a few were talking; most, however, were unknown to each other, and if they spoke at all, it was only to ask each other when his Lordship might be expected to appear.

As is customary at a great lord's levée, there were present men of all conditions; they agreed, however, in one point: they were all beggars. It is the lot of the nobleman that he should be chiefly courted for the things that he can give away, and that the number of his friends and the warmth of their friendship depend upon the influence he is supposed to possess in the bestowal of places and appointments.

Among the suitors this morning, for instance, was a half-pay captain who sought for a company in a newly raised regiment; he bore himself bravely, but his face betrayed his anxiety and his necessities. The poor man would solicit his Lordship in vain, but this he did not know, and so he would be buoyed up for a time with new hopes. Beside him stood a lieutenant in the navy who wanted promotion and a ship. If good service and

wounds in battle were of any avail he should have commanded both, but it is very well known that in the Royal Navy there are no rewards for gallantry; men grow old without promotion; nothing helps but interest; a man may remain a midshipman for life without interest; never has it been known that without interest a ship has been bestowed even upon the most deserving officer and after the most signal service. The lieutenant, too, would be cheered by a promise, and lulled by false hopes; but that he did not know.

One man wanted a post in the Admiralty; the pay was small, but the perquisites and the pickings were large; for the same reason another asked for a place in the Customs. A young poet attended with a subscription list and a dedication. He thought that his volume of verse, once published, would bring him fortune, fame, and friends. He, too, would be disappointed. The clergyman wanted another living; one of the fat and comfortable non-resident livings; a deanery would not be amiss; he was even ready to take upon himself the office of bishop, for which, indeed, he considered that his qualifications admirably fitted him. Would his Lordship exercise his all-powerful influence in the matter of that benefice or that promotion?

A young man, whose face betrayed the battered rake, would be contented even with carrying the colours in the Cape Coast Regiment, if nothing better could be had. Surely his Lordship would procure so small a thing as that! If nothing could be found for him, then—the common side of the King's Bench Prison and rags and starvation until death released him. Poor wretch! He was on his way to that refuge, but he knew it not; for my Lord would promise to procure for him what he wanted.

So they all waited, hungry and expectant, thinking how best to frame their requests; how best to appear grateful before there was any call for gratitude. Surely a nobleman must grow wearied with the assurances of gratitude and promises of prayers. His experience must teach him that gratitude is but a short-lived plant; a weed which commonly flourishes for a brief period and produces neither flowers nor fruit; while as for the prayers, though we may make no doubt that the fervent prayer of the righteous availeth much, we are nowhere assured that the prayers of the worldly and the unrighteous are heard on behalf of another, while there is no certainty that the promised petition will ever be offered up before the Throne. Yet the suitors day after day repeat the same promise, and rely on the same belief. 'Oh! my Lord,' they say or sing with one accord, 'your name; your voice; your influence; it is all that I ask. My gratitude; my lifelong gratitude; my service; my prayers will all be yours.'

Soon after twelve o'clock the doors of the private apartments were thrown open and his Lordship appeared, wearing the look of dignity and proud condescension combined, which well became the star he wore and the ancient title which he had inherited. His age was about thirty, a time of life when there linger some remains of youth and the serious responsibilities are as yet with some men hardly felt. His face was cold and proud and hard; the lips firmly set; the eyes keen and even piercing; the features regular; his stature tall but not ungainly, his figure manly. It was remarkable, among those who knew him intimately, that there was as yet no sign of luxurious living on face and figure. He was not, so far, swelled out with wine and punch; his neck was still slender; his face pale, without any tell-tale marks of wine and debauchery; so far as

appearance goes he might pass, if he chose, for a person of the most rigid and even austere virtue. This, as I have said, was considered remarkable by his friends, most of whom were already stamped on face and feature and figure with the outward and visible tokens of a profligate life. For, to confess the truth at the very beginning, and not to attempt concealment or to suffer a false belief as regards this nobleman, he was nothing better than a cold-blooded, pitiless, selfish libertine, a rake, and a voluptuary, one who knew and obeyed no laws save the laws of (so-called) honour.

These laws allow a man to waste his fortune at the gaming-table; to ruin confiding girls; to spend his time with rake-hell companions in drink, and riot, and debauchery of all kinds. He must, however, pay his gambling debts; he must not cheat at cards; he must be polite in speech; he must be ready to fight whenever the occasion calls for his sword and the quarrel seems of sufficient importance. Lord Fylingdale, it must be owned, was not among those who find their chief pleasure in scouring the streets and in mad riot. You shall learn, in due course, what forms of pleasure chiefly attracted him.

I have said that his face was proud. There was not, I believe, any man living in the whole world who could compare with Lord Fylingdale for pride. An overwhelming pride sat upon his brow; was proclaimed by his eyes and was betrayed by his carriage. With such pride did Lucifer look round upon his companions, fallen as they were, and in the depths of hopeless ruin.

In many voyages to foreign parts I have seen something of foreign peoples; every nation possesses its own nobility; I suppose that king, lords and commons is the order designed for human society by Providence. But I think that there is nowhere any pride equal to the pride of the

English aristocracy. The Spaniard, if I have observed him aright, wraps himself in the pride of birth as with a cloak; it is often a tattered cloak; poverty has no terrors for him so long as he has his pride of birth. Yet he tolerates his fellow-countrymen, whom he does not despise because they lack what most he prizes. The English gentleman, whether a peer or only a younger son, or a nephew or a cousin, provided he is a sprig of quality, disdains and despises all those who belong to the world of work, and have neither title, nor pedigree, nor coat of arms. He does not see any necessity for concealing this contempt. He lacks the courtesy which would hide it in the presence of the man of trade or the member of a learned profession. To be sure, the custom of the country encourages him, because to him is given every place and every preferment. He fills the House of Commons as well as the House of Lords; he commands our armies, our regiments, even the companies in the regiments; he commands our fleets and our ships; he holds all the appointments and draws all the salaries; he makes our laws, and, as Justice of the Peace, he administers them; he receives pensions, having done nothing to deserve them; he holds sinecures which require no duties. And the people who do the work—the merchants who bring wealth to the country; the manufacturers; the craftsmen; the farmers; the soldiers who fight the wars which the aristocracy consider necessary; the sailor who carries the flag all over the world—all these are supposed to be sufficiently well rewarded with a livelihood while they maintain the nobility and all their kin in luxury and in idleness, and are rewarded and treated with contempt.

I speak of what I have myself witnessed. This man's pride I have compared with the pride of Lucifer. You shall learn, while I narrate the things which follow, that

he might well be compared, as regards his actions as well, with that proud and presumptuous spirit.

He was dressed in a manner becoming to his rank. Need we dwell upon his coat of purple velvet, his embroidered waistcoat, his white silk stockings, his ruffles and cravat of lace, his gold buckles and his gold clocks, his lace hat carried under his arm, his jewelled sword-hilt and the rings upon his fingers? You would think by his dress that his wealth was equal to his pride, and, by his reception of the suitors, that his power was equal to both pride and wealth together.

The levée began. One after the other stepped up to him, spoke a few words, received a few words in reply, and retired, each apparently well pleased, for promises cost nothing. To the poet who asked for a subscription and proffered a dedication my Lord promised the former, accepted the latter, and added a few words of praise and good wishes. But the subscription was never paid, and the dedication was afterwards altered, so far as the superscription, to another noble patron. To the clergyman who asked for a country living then vacant, my Lord promised the most kindly consideration, and bade him write his request and send it him by letter for better assurance of remembrance. To the officer he promised his company as only due to gallantry and military skill; to the place-hunter he promised a post far beyond the dreams and the hopes of the suppliant. Nothing more came of it to either.

The company grew thin; one after the other the suitors withdrew to feed on promises, which is like opening your mouth to drink the wind. But 'twas all they got.

Among those who remained to the last was a man in the dress of a substantial shopkeeper, with a brown cloth coat and silver buttons. He, when his opportunity arrived, advanced and bowed low to my Lord.

'Sir,' said his Lordship, with gracious but cold looks, 'in what way may I be of service to you?'

'With your Lordship's permission, I would seek a place in your household—any place, scullion in the kitchen or groom to the stable—any place.'

'Why should I give you a place? Have I room in my household for every broken cit?'

'My Lord; it is to save me from bankruptcy and the King's Bench. It is to save my wife and children from destitution. There are already many shopkeepers in Westminster and the City who have been admitted servants in the household of noblemen. It is no new thing; your Lordship must have heard of the custom.'

'I do not know why I should save thy family or thyself. However, this is the affair of my steward. Go and see him. Tell him that a place in my household will save thee from bankruptcy and prison. It may be that a place is vacant.'

The man bowed again and retired. He knew very well what was meant. He would have to pay a round sum for the privilege. This noble lord, like many others of his rank, took money, through his steward, for nominal places in his household, making one citizen yeoman of his dairy—in Leicester Fields, perhaps, where no dairy could be placed; another, steward of the granaries, having in the town neither barns nor storehouses nor ricks; a third, clerk to the stud-book, having no racehorses, and so on. Thus justice is defeated, a man's creditors may be defied, and a man may escape payment of his just debts.

When he was gone, Lord Fylingdale looked round the room. In the window stood, dangling a cane from his wrist, a gentleman dressed in the highest and the latest fashion. In his left hand he held a snuff-box, adorned with the figure of a heathen goddess. To those who knew

the meaning of fashion, it was evident that he was in the front rank, belonging to the few who follow or command the variations of the passing hour. These descend to the smallest details. I am told that the secrets of the inner circle, the select few who lead the fashion, are displayed for their own gratification in the length of the cravat, the colour of the sash, the angle of the sword, the breadth of the ruffles, the width of the skirts, the tie of the wig. They are also shown in the mincing voice and the affected tone, and the use of the latest adjectives and oaths. Yet, when one looked more closely, it was seen that this gallant exterior arrayed an ancient gentleman whose years were proclaimed by the sharpening of his features, the wrinkles of his face, the crows' feet round his eyes, and his bending shoulders, which he continually endeavoured to set square and upright. Hat in one hand, and snuff-box in the other, he ambled toward his Lordship on tiptoe, which happened just then to be the fashionable gait.

'Thy servant, Sir Harry.' My Lord offered him his hand with condescension. 'It warms my heart to see thee. Therefore I sent a letter. Briefly, Sir Harry, wouldst do me a service?'

'I am always at your Lordship's commands. This, I hope, I have proved.'

'Then, Sir Harry, this is the case. It is probable that, for certain private reasons, I may have to pay a visit to a country town—a town of tarpaulins and traders, not a town of fashion.' Sir Harry shuddered. 'Patience, my friend. I know not how long I shall endure the barbaric company. But I must go—there are reasons—let me whisper—reasons of State—important secrets which call me there.' Sir Harry smiled, and looked incredulous. 'I want, on the spot, a friend'—Sir Harry smiled again, as one who began to understand—'a friend who would appear

to be a stranger. Would you, therefore, play the part of such a friend?'

'I will do whatever your Lordship commands. Yet, to leave town at this season'—it was then the month of April—'the Assembly, the Park, the card-table, the society of the ladies.'

'The loss will be theirs, Sir Harry. To lose their old favourite—oh! there will be lamentations at the rout. Perhaps, however, we may find consolations.'

'Impossible. There are none out of town, except at Bath or Tunbridge.'

'The ladies of Norfolk are famous for their beauty.'

'Hoydens, I know them.

> '"I who erst beneath a tree
> Sang Bumpkinet and Bowzybee,
> And Blouze'ind and Marian bright
> In aprons blue and aprons white,"

as Gay hath it. Hoydens, my Lord, I know them. They play whist and dance jigs.'

'The Norfolk gentlemen drink hard, and the wine is good.'

'Nay, my Lord, this is cruel, for I can drink no longer.'

'I shall find other diversions for you. It is possible—I say—possible—that the Lady Anastasia may go there as well. She will, as usual, keep the bank if she does go.'

The old beau's face cleared, whether in anticipation of Lady Anastasia's society or her card-table I know not.

'My character, Sir Harry, will be in your hands. I leave it there confidently. For reasons—reasons of State—it should be a character of——'

'I understand. Your Lordship is a model of all the virtues.'

'My friends flatter me. My secretary will converse with thee further on the point.'

Sir Harry retired, bowing and twisting his body something like an ape.

Then a gentleman in scarlet presented himself.

'Your Lordship's most obedient,' he said with scant courtesy. 'I come in obedience to your letter—for commands.'

'Colonel, you will hold yourself in readiness to go into the country. There will be play—you may lose as much as you please—to Sir Harry Malyns or to anyone else whom my secretary will point out to you. Perhaps you may have to receive a remonstrance—even a rough admonition—from me. We are strangers, remember, and I am no gambler, though I sometimes take a card.'

'I await your Lordship's further commands.' So he, too, retired. A proper, well-set-up figure he was, with the insolence of the trooper in his face and signs of strong drink on his nose. Anyone who knew the town would set him down for a half-pay captain, a sharper, a bully, a roysterer, one who lived by his wits, one who was skilled in billiards, and commonly lucky at any game of cards. Perhaps such a judgment of the gallant Colonel would not be far wrong.

There remained one suitor. He was a clergyman dressed in a fine silk cassock with bands of the whitest, and a noble wig of the order ecclesiastic. I doubt if the Archbishop himself had a finer. He looked in all respects a divine of the superior kind; a dean, perhaps; an archdeacon, perhaps; a canon, rector, vicar, chaplain with a dozen benefices, no doubt. His thin, slight figure carried a head too big for his body. His face was sallow and thin, the features regular; he bore the stamp of a scholar and had the manner of a scoffer. He spoke as if he was in the pulpit, with a voice loud, clear, and resonant, as though the mere power of hearing that voice diffused around him the blessings of virtue and piety and a clear conscience.

'Good my Lord,' he said, 'I am, as usual, a suppliant.

The Rectory of St. Leonard le Size, Jewry, in the City, is now vacant. With my small benefices in the country it would suit me hugely. A word from your Lordship to the Lord Mayor—the Rectory is in the gift of the Corporation —would, I am sure, suffice.'

'If, my old tutor, the thing can be done by me, you may consider it as settled. There are, however, I would have you to consider, one or two scandals still outstanding, the memory of which may have reached the ears of the City. These City people, for all their ignorance of fashion, do sometimes hear of things. That little affair at Bath, for instance——'

'The lady hath since returned to her own home. It is quite blown over and forgotten. My innocency is already well known to your Lordship.'

'Assuredly. Has that other little business at Oxford blown over? Are certain verses still attributed to the Reverend Benjamin Purdon?'

His Reverence lightly blew upon his fingers. 'That report is now forgotten: but 'tis a censorious world. One man is hanged for looking over a gate while another steals a pig and is applauded. As for the author of these verses, he still remains undiscovered. The verses themselves—a deplorable fact—are handed about, I hear, for the joy of the undergraduates.'

'Next time, then, steal the pig. Frankly, friend Purdon, thy name is none of the sweetest, and I doubt if the Bishop would consent. Meantime, you are living, as usual, I suppose, at great expense.'

'At small expense, considering my abilities; but still at greater expense than my slender income will allow. Am I not your Lordship's domestic chaplain? Must I not keep up the dignity due to the position?'

'Your dignity is costly. I must get a bishopric or a

deanery at least for you. Meantime I have a small service to ask of you.'

'Small? My Lord, let it be great; it cannot be too great.'

'It is that you go into the country for me.'

'Not to Bath, or to Oxford?' His Reverence betrayed an anxiety on this point which was not quite in harmony with his previous declarations.

'Not to either. To another place where they know not thy name or thy fame. Very good. I thought I could depend upon your loyalty. As for arrangements and time, you will hear from my secretary.' So my lord turned on his heel and his chaplain was dismissed. He remained for a moment, looking after his master doubtfully. The order liked him not. He was growing old and would have chosen, had he the power of choice, some fat City benefice, with the two or three small country livings that he had already.

He was tired of his dependence; perhaps he was tired of a life that ill became his profession; perhaps he could no longer enjoy it as of old. There was, at least, no sign of repentance as there was no touch of the spiritual life in his face, which was stamped with the plain and visible marks of the world, the flesh, and the Devil. What is that stamp? Nobody can paint it, or describe it; yet it is understood and recognised whenever one sees it. And it stood out legible, so that all those who ran might read it upon the face of this reverend and learned Divine.

When the levée was finished and everybody gone, Lord Fylingdale sank into a chair. I know not the nature of his thoughts, save that they were not pleasant, for his face grew darker every moment. Finally, he sprang to his feet and rang the bell. 'Tell Mr. Semple that I would speak with him,' he ordered.

Mr. Semple, the same Samuel whom you have seen under a basting from the Captain, was now changed, and for the better. His dress was simple. No one could guess from his apparel the nature of his occupation. For all professions and all crafts there is a kind of uniform. The divine wears gown and cassock, bands and wig which proclaim his calling; the lawyer is also known by his gown, and marks his rank at the bar by coif and wig; the attorney puts on broadcloth black of hue; the physician assumes black velvet, a magisterial wig, and a gold-headed cane. The officer wears the King's scarlet; the nobleman his star; the sprig of quality puts on fine apparel and takes an air and manner unknown to Cheapside and Ludgate Hill; you may also know him by his speech. The merchant wears black velvet, with gold buttons, gold buckles, white silk stockings, and a gold-laced hat; the shopkeeper substitutes silver for gold, and cloth for velvet; the clerk has brown cloth, metal buttons and worsted stockings. As for the crafts, has not each his own jacket, sleeves, apron, cap, and badge?

But for this man, where would we place him? What calling did he represent? For he wore the flowered waistcoat —somewhat frayed and stained—of a beau, and the black coat of the merchant; the worsted stockings of the clerk and his metal buttons. Yet he was neither gentleman, merchant, shopkeeper, clerk, nor craftsman. He was a member of that fraternity which is no fraternity, because there is no brotherhood among them all; in which every man delights to slander, gird at, and to depreciate his brother.

In other words, he wore the dress—which is no uniform —of a poet. At this time he also called himself secretary to his Lordship, having, by ways known only to himself, and by wrigglings up back stairs, and services of a kind

never proclaimed to the world, made himself useful. The position also granted him, as it granted certain tradesmen, immunity from arrest. He had the privilege of walking abroad through a street full of hungering creditors, and that not on Sundays only, like most of his tribe, but on every day in the week.

He obeyed the summons, and entered the room with a humble cringe.

'Semple,' said his Lordship, crossing his legs and playing with the tassel of his sword-knot, 'I have read thy letter——'

'Your Lordship will impute——'

'First, what is the meaning of the preamble?'

'I have been your Lordship's secretary for six months. I have therefore perused all your Lordship's letters. I have also, in my zeal for your Lordship's interests, looked about me. And I discovered—what I ventured to state in that preamble.'

'Well, sir?'

'Namely, that the Fylingdale estates are gone so far as your Lordship's life is concerned—but—in a word—all is gone. And that—your Lordship will pardon the plain truth—your Lordship's credit cannot last long, and that—I now touch a most delicate point to a man of your Lordship's nice sense of honour—the only resource left is precarious.'

'You mean?'

'I mean—a certain lady and a certain bank.'

'How, sir? Do you dare? What has put this suspicion into your head?'

'Nay, my Lord. I have no thought but for your Lordship's interests, believe me.'

'And so you tell me about the rustic heiress, and you propose a plan——'

'I have had the temerity to do so.'

'Yes. Tell me once more about this girl—and about her fortune.'

'Her name is Molly Miller; she is an orphan; her guardian is an honest sailor who has taken the greatest care of her property. She was an heiress already when her father died. That was eighteen years ago; she is now nineteen.'

'Is she passable—to look at? A hoyden with a high colour, I warrant.'

'A cream-coloured complexion touched with red and pink; light hair in curls and blue eyes; the face and figure of a Venus; the sweetest mouth in the world and the fondest manner.'

'Hang me if the fellow isn't in love with her himself! If she is all this, man, why not apply yourself for the post of spouse?'

'Because her guardian keeps off all would-be lovers, and destines his ward for a gentlemen at least—for a nobleman, he hopes.'

'He is ambitious. Now as to her fortune.'

'She has a fleet of half a dozen tall vessels—nay, there are more, but I know not how many. I was formerly clerk in a counting-house in the town, and I learned a great deal—what each is worth, and what the freight of each voyage may produce—but not all. The Captain, her guardian, keeps things close. My Lord, I can assure you, from what I learned in that capacity, and by looking into old books, that she must be worth over a hundred thousand pounds—over a hundred thousand pounds! My Lord, there is no such heiress in the City. In your Lordship's interests I have inquired in the taverns where the merchants' clerks congregate. They know of all the City heiresses. The greatest at this moment is the only daughter of a

'GRATITUDE, MY LORD, TO YOU.'

tallow-chandler, who has twenty thousand to her name. She squints.'

'Why have you given me this information? The girl belongs to your friends—are you anxious for her happiness? You know my way of life. Would that way make her happier?'

The man made no reply.

'Come, Semple, out with it. Your reasons? Gratitude to me? Or revenge upon an enemy?'

The man coloured. He looked up; he stood upright, but for a moment only. Then his eyes dropped, and his shoulders contracted.

'Gratitude, my Lord, to you,' he replied. 'Revenge? Why, what reasons should I have for revenge?'

'How should I know of any? Let it be gratitude, then.'

'I have ventured to submit—not a condition, but a prayer.'

'I have read the clause. I grant it. On the day after the marriage, if the plan comes to anything, I will present thee to a place where there are no duties and many perquisites. That is understood. I would put this promise in writing, but no writing would bind me more than my word.'

'Yet, I would have the promise in writing.'

'You are insolent, sirrah.'

'I am protecting myself. My Lord, I must speak openly in this matter. How many promises have you made this morning? I stood aside and listened. How many will you keep? I must not be pushed aside with such a promise.'

Lord Fylingdale made no reply.

'I offer you a fortune of a hundred thousand pounds, and more.'

'I can now take this fortune without your assistance.'

'With submission, my Lord, you cannot. I know too much!'

'What shall I write, then?'

'I am only reasonable. The girl's fortune when you have it will go the same way as your rents and woods have gone. Provide for me, therefore, before you begin to spend that money.'

'Semple, I did not think you had so much courage. A dozen times at least I have been on the point of kicking you out of the house. Very well, then.' He sat up. 'Give me paper and a pen, and I will write this promise.'

Semple laid paper and pen upon the table.

'Let me presume so far as to dictate the promise,' he said. '"I undertake and promise that on the day after my marriage with the girl named Molly Miller I will give Samuel Semple such a place as will provide him for life with a salary of not less than £200 a year." So—will your Lordship sign it?'

He took up this precious paper as soon as it was signed, read it aloud, folded it, and put it in his pocket.

'What next?' asked his patron.

'I am preparing a scheme which will give a plausible excuse for your Lordship's visit to the town. I have already suggested that certain friends should prepare the way. The lady's guardian has prejudices in favour of morality and religion. They are, I know, beneath your Lordship's notice, yet still, it will be, in fact, necessary that your Lordship's character shall be such as will commend itself to this unfashionable old sailor.'

'I have already taken steps upon this point. The girl, you say, has no lover.'

'She has no lover. Your lordship's rank; your manner; your appearance will certainly carry the day. By contrast

alone with the country bumpkins the heart of the girl will be won.'

'Mr. Semple'—his Lordship yawned—'do you suppose that the heart of the girl concerns me? The heart of the girl—and you call yourself my secretary! Go and complete your scheme — of gratitude — of gratitude, not revenge.'

CHAPTER II

THE LADY ANASTASIA

The Lady Anastasia was in her dressing-room in the hands of her *friseur*, the French hairdresser, and her maid. She sat in a déshabillé, which was a loose robe, called, I believe, a nightgown, of pink silk trimmed with lace, which showed the greater part of a very well-shaped arm; she had one slipper off and one slipper on, which showed a very small and well-shaped foot, but no one was there to see it. Her maid was busy at the toilette-table, which was covered with glass bottles containing liquids of attractive colour, silver patch-boxes, powder-boxes, powder-puffs, cosmetics in pots, and other mysterious secrets into which it would be useless and fruitless to inquire. The artist for his part was laboriously and conscientiously building the edifice—object of so much ingenuity and thought—called a 'head.'

She was in the best temper imaginable. When you hear that she had won overnight the sum of one hundred and twenty guineas you will understand that she had exactly that number of reasons for being satisfied with the world. Moreover, she had received from an admirer a present in the shape of a piece of china representing a monkey, which, she reflected with satisfaction, would awaken in the minds of her friends the keenest feelings of envy, jealousy, hatred, longing, and despair.

The Lady Anastasia was the young widow of an old peer; she was also the daughter of an earl and the sister of his successor. She therefore enjoyed the freedom of a widow, the happiness natural to youth, and all the privileges of rank. No woman could be happier. It was reported that her love of the card-table had greatly impaired her income; the world said that her own private dowry was wholly gone and a large part of her jointure. But it is a spiteful world—all that was known for certain was that she played much, and that she played high. Perhaps Fortune in a mood of penitence was giving back what she had previously taken away. The contrary is commonly the case, viz., that Fortune, which certainly takes away with alacrity, restores with reluctance. Perhaps, however, the reports were not true.

She kept a small establishment in Mount Street; her people consisted of no more than two footmen, a butler, a lady's-maid, a housekeeper, and three or four maids, with two chairmen. She did not live as a rich woman; she received, it is true, twice a week, on Sundays and Wednesdays, but not with any expense of supper and wine. Her friends came to play cards, and she held the bank for them. On other evenings she went out and played at the houses of her friends.

Except for fashions and her dress—what fine woman but makes that exception?—she had no other occupation, no other pursuit, no other subject of conversation, than the playing of cards. She played at all games and knew them all; she sat down with a willing mind to ombre, faro, quadrille, basset, loo, cribbage, all fours, or beggar my neighbour; but mostly she preferred the game of hazard when she herself kept the bank. It is a game which more than any other allures and draws on the player, so that a young man who has never before been

known to set a guinea on any card, or to play at any game, will, in a single night, be filled with all the ardour and eagerness of a practised gamester—will know the extremes of joy and despair, and will regard the largest fortune as bestowed by Providence for no other purpose than to prolong the excitement and the agony of a gamester.

While the Lady Anastasia was still admiring the china monkey set upon the table so that she might gaze upon it and so refresh her soul, and while the *friseur* was still completing her head, Lord Fylingdale was announced. The lady blushed violently; she sat up and looked anxiously in the glass.

'Betty,' she cried, 'a touch of red—not much, you clumsy creature! Will you never learn to have a lighter hand? So! that is better. I am horribly pale. His Lordship can wait in the morning-room. You have nearly finished, monsieur? Quick, then! The last touches. Betty, the flowered satin petticoat. My fan. The pearl necklace. So,' she looked again at the glass, 'am I looking tolerable, Betty?'

'Your ladyship is ravishing,' said Betty, finishing the toilette. In truth, it was a very pretty creature if one knew not how much was real and how much was due to art. The complexion was certainly laid on; the hair was powdered and built up over cushions and pillows; there were patches on the cheek; the neck was powdered; eyes, naturally very fine, were set off and made more lustrous with a touch of dark powder; the frock and petticoat and hoop were all alike removed from Nature. However, the result was a beautiful woman of fashion, who is far removed indeed from the beautiful woman as made by the Creator. For her age, the Lady Anastasia might have been seven-and-twenty, or even thirty—an age when, with

'AM I LOOKING TOLERABLE, BETTY?'

some women, the maturity of their beauty is even more charming than the first sprightly loveliness of youth.

She swam out of the room with a gliding movement then the fashion, and entered the morning-room, where Lord Fylingdale awaited her.

'Anastasia!' he said softly, taking her hand. 'It is very good of you to see me alone. I feared you would be surrounded with courtiers and fine ladies, or with singers, musicians, hairdressers, and other baboons. Permit me,' he raised her hand to his lips. 'You look divine this morning. It is long since I have seen you look so perfectly charming.'

The lady murmured something. She was one of those women who like, above all things, to hear praises of what most they prize, their beauty, and to believe what they most desire to be the truth, the preservation and perfecting of that beauty.

'But you came to see me alone. Was it to tell me that I look charming? Other men tell me as much in company.'

'Not altogether that, dear lady, though that is something. I come to tell you of a change of plans.'

'You have heard that the Grand Jury of Middlesex has presented me by name as a corruptor of innocence and I know not what because I hold my bank on Sunday nights?'

'I have heard something of the matter. It is almost time, I think, to give these presumptuous shopkeepers a lesson not to interfere with the pursuits of persons of rank. Let them confine themselves to the 'prentices who play at pitch and toss.'

'Oh! what matters their presentment? I shall continue to keep the bank on Sunday nights. Now, my dear lord, what about these plans? What is changed?'

'We thought, you remember, about going to Tunbridge in July.'

'Well? Shall we not go there?'

'Perhaps. But there is something to be done first. Let me confide in you——'

'My dear lord, you have never confided in anybody.'

'Except in you. I think you know all my secrets, if I have any. In whom else can I confide? In the creatures who importune me for places? In friends of the green table? In friends of the racecourse? My dear Anastasia, you know, I assure you, as much about my personal affairs as I know myself.'

'If you would always speak so kindly'—her eyes became humid, but not tearful. A lady of fashion must not spoil her cheek by tears.

'Well, then, the case is this. You know of the condition of my affairs—no one better. An opportunity presents itself to effect a great improvement. I am invited by the highest personage to take a more active part in the affairs of State. No one is to know this. For reasons connected with this proposal I am to visit a certain town—a trading town—a town of rough sailors, there to conduct certain inquiries. There is to be a gathering at this town of the gentry and people of the county. Would you like to go, my dear friend? It will be next month.'

'To leave town—and in May, just before the end of the season?'

'There will be opportunities, I am told, of holding a bank, and a good many sportsmen—'tis a sporting county—may be expected to lay their money. In a word, Anastasia, it will not be a bad exchange.'

'And how can I help you? Why should I go there?'

'By letting the people, the county people, understand

the many virtues and graces which distinguish my character. No one knows me better than yourself.'

The lady smiled. 'No one,' she murmured.

'—— or can speak with greater authority on the subject. There will be certain of our friends there—the Parson—Sir Harry—the Colonel——'

'Pah! A beggarly crew! and blown upon! They are dangerous.'

'Not at this quiet and secluded town. They will be strangers to you as well as to me. And they will be useful. After all, in such a place you need an opening. They will lead the way.'

The lady made no response.

'I may call it settled, then?' He still held her hand. 'If you would rather not go, Anastasia, I will find someone else. But I had hoped——'

She drew away her hand. 'You are right,' she said; 'no one knows you so well as myself. And all I know about you is that you are always contriving some devilry. What is it this time? But you will not tell me. You never tell me.'

'Anastasia, you do me an injustice. This is purely a political step.'

'As you will. Call it what you please. I am your servant—you know that—your handmaid—in all things—save one. Not for any other woman, Ludovick—not for any other—unfortunate—woman will I lift my little finger. Should you betray me in this respect——'

He laughed.

'A woman? And in that company? Rest easy, dear child. Be jealous as much as you please, but not with such a cause.'

He touched her cheek with his finger; he stooped and kissed her hand, and withdrew.

The Lady Anastasia stood awhile where he left her. The joy had gone out of her heart; she trembled; she was seized with a foreboding of evil. She threw herself upon the sofa and buried her face in her hands, and, forgetful of paste and patch and paint, she suffered the murderous tears to destroy that work of art—her finished face.

CHAPTER III

THE 'SOCIETY' OF LYNN

It was about seven o'clock in the evening of early April, at the going down of the sun, that I was at last able to drop into the dinghy and go ashore. All day and all night, and all the day before, we had been beating through the shallows of the Wash and the narrow channel of the Ouse. We had laid her to her mooring off the Common Stath, and made all taut and trim; the captain had gone ashore with the papers; the Custom House officer had been aboard; we were to begin breaking cargo on the morrow. The ship was the *Lady of Lynn*, 380 tons, Robert Jaggard, master mariner, being captain, and I still the mate or chief officer. There was no better skipper in the port of Lynn than Captain Jaggard; there was no better crew than that aboard the *Lady of Lynn*; not a skulker or a lubber in the whole ship's company; and though I say it myself, I dare affirm that the mate did credit to his ship as much as the captain and the crew. We were in the Lisbon trade; we had therefore come home laded with casks of the rich strong wine of the country; the port and Lisbon sherry and Malaga, besides Madeira and the wine of Teneriffe and the Grand Canary. Our people of the Marshland and the Fens, and those of Lincolnshire and Norfolk, where the strong air and the east winds kill all but the stoutest, cannot have too much of this rich wine; they will not

drink the lighter wines of Bordeaux, which neither fire the blood nor mount to the head. A prosperous voyage we had made; the Bay of Biscay suffered us to cross with no more than half a gale; the *Lady of Lynn*, in fact, was known in port to be a lucky ship—as lucky as her owner—lucky in her voyages and lucky in her cargoes.

At the stairs of the Common Stath Yard I made fast the painter and shipped the sculls. And there, waiting for me, was none other than my good old friend and patron, Captain Crowle.

The Captain was by this time well advanced in life, being past seventy years; yet he showed little touch of time; his honest face being still round and full; his eyes still free from lines and crow's-feet; his cheek ruddy and freckled, as if with the salt sea-breeze and the driving spray. He was also as upright as any man of thirty, and walked with as firm a step, and had no need of the stout stick which he carried in his hand, as a weapon and a cudgel for the unrighteous, more than a staff for the bending knees of old age.

'What cheer—ahoy?' he shouted from the quay as I dropped over the side into the dinghy. 'What cheer, Jack?' he repeated when I ran up the steps. 'I've seen the skipper. Come with me to the Crown'—but the proper place for mates was the Duke's Head. 'Nay, it shall be the Crown. A bowl of punch shall welcome back the *Lady of Lynn*.' He turned and looked at the ship lying in the river at her moorings among the other craft. 'She's as fine a vessel as this old port can show—and she's named after as fine a maid. Shalt see her to-morrow, Jack, but not to-night.'

'I trust, sir, that she is well and in good spirits.'

'Ay—ay. Nothing ails her—nothing ails her, Jack.' He pointed with his stick. 'Look how she flourishes.

There are fifteen tall ships moored two and two off the King's Stath, and half a dozen more off the Common Stath. Count them, Jack. Six of these ships belong to the little maid. Six of them—and two more are afloat, of which one is homeward bound, and should be in port soon if all goes well. Eight noble ships, Jack, are hers. And the income of nigh upon eighteen years, and houses and broad lands.

'She has a prudent guardian, Captain.'

'May be—may be. I don't deny, Jack, but I've done the best I could. Year after year the money mounteth up more and more. You love her, Jack, and therefore I tell you these things. And you can keep counsel. I talk not in the Market Place. No one knows her wealth but you and me. They think that I am part owner. I let them think so, but you and I know better, Jack.'

He nodded his head, looking mighty cunning.

'She cannot be too wealthy or too prosperous, Captain. I know full well that her prosperity only increases the gulf between us; but I had long ago understood that such an heiress was not for a mate on board a merchantman.'

'She is not, Jack,' the Captain replied gravely. 'Already she is the richest heiress in all Norfolk—perhaps in the whole country. Who is to marry her? There, I confess, I am at a loss. I must find a husband for her. There's the rub. She may marry any in the land; there is none so high but he would desire a wife so rich and so virtuous. Where shall I look for a husband fit for her? There are admirals, but mostly too old for her; she ought to have a noble lord, yet, if all tales be true, they are not fit most of them to marry a virtuous woman. Shall I give Molly to a man who gambles and drinks and rakes and riots? No, Jack, no; not for twenty coronets. I would rather marry her to an honest sailor like yourself. Jack, my lad, find me a noble lord, as like yourself as one pea is like

another, and he shall have her. He must be as proper a man; as strong a man; a clean liver; moderate in his cups . . . find him for me, Jack, and he shall have her.'

'Well, but, Captain, there are the gentlemen of Norfolk.'

'Ay! there are, as you say, the gentlemen. I have considered them, Jack. Molly is not a gentlewoman by birth, I know that very well; but her fortune entitles her to marry in a higher rank. Ay! there are the gentlemen. They are good fox-hunters; they are good at horse-racing; but they are hard drinkers, alack; they are fuddled most evenings; my little maid must not have a husband who is put to bed drunk every night.'

'You must take her to London, Captain, and let her be seen.'

'Ay, ay, if I only knew where to go and how to begin.'

'She is young; there is no need for hurry; you can wait awhile, Captain.'

'Ay, we can wait awhile. I shall be loath to let her go, God knows. Come to-morrow, Jack. She was always fond of you; she talks about you; 'tis a loving little maid; you played with her and ran about with her. She never forgets. The next command that falls in—but I talk too fast. Well—when there is a ship in her fleet without a captain—but come, my lad.'

He led the way, still talking of his ward and her perfections, through the narrow street they call Stath Lane into the great Market Place where stands the Crown Inn.

The room appropriated to the 'Society of Lynn,' which met every evening all the year round, was that on the ground floor looking upon the Market Place. The 'Society,' or club, which is never dissolved, consists of the notables or better sort of the town; the Vicar of St. Margaret's; the Curate of St. Nicholas; the master of the school—my own father; Captain Crowle and other

retired captains; the doctor; some of the more substantial merchants; with the Mayor, some of the Aldermen, the Town Clerk, and a Justice of the Peace or two. This evening most of these gentlemen were already present.

Captain Crowle saluted the company and took his seat at the head of the table. 'Gentlemen,' he said, 'I wish you all a pleasant evening. I have brought with me my young friend, Jack Pentecrosse—you all know Jack—the worthy son of his worthy father. He will take a glass with us. Sit down beside me, Jack.'

'With the permission of the Society,' I said.

Most of the gentlemen had already before them their pipes and their tobacco. Some had ordered their drink—a pint of port for one; a brown George full of old ale for another; a flask of Canary for a third; and so on. But the Captain, looking round the room, beckoned to the girl who waited. 'Jenny,' said he, 'nobody calls for anything to-night except myself. Gentlemen, it must be a bowl—or a half-dozen bowls. Tell your mistress, Jenny, a bowl of the biggest and the strongest and the sweetest. Gentlemen, you will drink with me to the next voyage of the *Lady of Lynn*.'

But then a thing happened which drove all thoughts of the *Lady of Lynn* out of everybody's mind. That toast was forgotten.

The news was brought by the doctor, who was the last to arrive.

It was an indication of the importance of our town that a physician lived among us. He was the only physician in this part of the country; he practised among the better sort, among the gentlemen of the county round about Lynn, and even further afield in the northern parts of the shire; and among the substantial merchants of the town. For the rest, there were the apothecary, the barber

and blood-letter, the bone-setter, the herbalist, and the wise woman. Many there are, even among the better sort, who would rather consult the woman who knows the powers of every herb that grows than the physician who would write you out the prescription of Mithridates or some other outlandish name composed of sixty or seventy ingredients. However, there is no doubt that learning is a fine thing, and that Galen knew more than the ancient dames who sit in a bower of dried herbs and brew them into nauseous drinks which pretend to cure all the diseases to which mankind is liable.

Dr. Worship was a person who habitually carried himself with dignity. His black dress, his white silk stockings, his gold shoe-buckles, the whiteness of his lace and linens, his huge wig, his gold-headed cane with its pomander, proclaimed his calling; while the shortness of his stature, with the roundness of his figure, his double chin, his thick lips, and his fat nose, all assisted him in the maintenance of his dignity. His voice was full and deep, like the voice of an organ, and he spoke slowly. It has, I believe, been remarked that dignity is more easily attained by a short, fat man than by one of a greater stature and a thinner person.

At the very first appearance of the doctor this evening it was understood that something had happened. For he had assumed an increased importance that was phenomenal; he had swollen, so to speak; he had become rounder and fuller in front. Everybody observed the change; yes, he was certainly broader in the shoulders; he carried himself with more than professional dignity; his wig had risen two inches in the fore top, and had descended four inches behind his back; his coat was not the plain cloth which he wore habitually in the town and at the tavern, but the black velvet which was reserved for those occasions when

he was summoned by a Person of Quality or one of the county gentry, and he carried the gold-headed cane with the pomander-box, which also belonged to those rare occasions.

'Gentlemen,' he said, looking around the room slowly and with emphasis, so that his change of manner and of stature—for men so seldom grow after fifty—and the emphasis with which he spoke and looked, gathering together all eyes, caused the company to understand, without any possibility of mistake, that something had happened of great importance. In the old town of Lynn Regis it is not often that anything happens. Ships, it is true, come and go; their departures and their arrivals form the staple of the conversation; but an event apart from the ships, a surprise, is rare. Once, ten years before this evening, a rumour of the kind which, as the journals say, wanted confirmation, reached the town that the French had landed in force and were marching upon London. The town showed its loyalty by a resolution to die in the last ditch; the resolution was passed by the Mayor over a bowl of punch; and though the report proved without foundation, the event remained historical; the loyalty and devotion of the borough—the King's own Borough—had passed through the fire of peril. The thing was remembered. Since that event nothing had happened worthy of note. And now something more was about to happen; the doctor's face was full of importance; he clearly brought great news.

Great news, indeed; and news forerunning a time unheard of in the chronicles of the town.

'Gentlemen,' the doctor laid his hat upon the table, and his cane beside it. Then he took his chair, adjusted his wig, and put on his spectacles, after which, laying his hands upon the arms of the chair, he once more looked

round the room, and all this in the most important, dignified, provoking, interesting manner possible. 'Gentlemen, I have news for you.'

As a rule this was a grave and a serious company; there was no singing; there was no laughing: there was no merriment. They were the seniors of the town; responsible persons; in authority and office; substantial, as regards their wealth; full of dignity and of responsibility. I have observed that the possession of wealth, much more than years, is apt to invest a man with serious views. There was little discourse because the opinions of everyone were perfectly well known; the wind; the weather; the crops; the ships; the health or the ailments of the company, formed the chief subjects of conversation. The placid evenings quietly and imperceptibly rolled away with some sense of festivity—in a tavern every man naturally assumes some show of cheerfulness, and at nine o'clock the assembly dispersed.

Captain Crowle made answer, speaking in the name of the society, 'Sir, we await your pleasure.'

'My news, gentlemen, is of a startling character. I will epitomize or abbreviate it. In a word, therefore, we are all about to become rich.'

Everybody sat upright. Rich? All to become rich? My father (who was the master of the Grammar School) and the Curate of St Nicholas shook their heads like Thomas the Doubter.

'All you who have houses or property in this town; all who are concerned in the trade of the town; all who direct the industries of the people—or take care of the health of the residents—will become, I say, rich.' My father and the curate, who were not included within these limits, again shook their heads, nodded expressively, but kept silence. Nobody, of course, expects the master of the

Grammar School or a curate ever to become rich. Fortune has no such gifts for them.

'We await your pleasure, sir,' the Captain repeated.

'Rich! You said that we were all to become rich,' murmured the Mayor, who was supposed to be in doubtful circumstances. 'If that were true——'

'I proceed to my narrative.' The doctor pulled out a pocket-book, from which he extracted a letter. 'I have received,' he went on, 'a letter from a townsman—the young man named Samuel Semple—Samuel Semple,' he repeated with emphasis, because a look of disappointment fell upon every face.

'Sam Semple,' growled the Captain. 'Once I broke a stick across his back.' He did not, however, explain why he had done so. 'I wish I had broken two. What has Sam Semple to do with the prosperity of the town?'

'You shall hear,' said the doctor.

'He would bring a book of profane verse to church instead of the Common Prayer,' said the Vicar.

'An idle rogue,' said the Mayor. 'I sent him packing out of my counting-house.'

'A fellow afraid of the sea,' said another. 'He might have become a supercargo by this time.'

'Yet not without some tincture of Greek,' said the schoolmaster; 'to do him justice, he loved books.'

'He made us subscribe a guinea each for his poems,' said the Vicar. 'Trash, gentlemen, trash! My copy is uncut.'

'Yet,' observed the Curate of St. Nicholas, 'in some sort, perhaps, a child of Parnassus. One of those, so to speak, born out of wedlock, and, I fear me, of uncertain parentage among the Muses, and unacknowledged by any. There are many such as Sam Semple on the slopes of that inhospitable hill. Is the young man starving, doctor?

Doth he solicit more subscriptions for another volume? It is the pay of the distressed poet.'

The doctor looked from one to the other with patience, and even resignation. They would be sorry, he meant them to think, that they had offered so many interruptions. When it seemed as if everyone had said what he wished to say, the doctor held up his hand, and so commanded silence.

CHAPTER IV

THE GRAND DISCOVERY

'Mr. Sam Semple,' the doctor continued with emphasis on the prefix, to which, indeed, the poet was not entitled in his native town, 'doth not ask for help; he is not starving; he is prosperous; he has gained the friendship, or the patronage, of certain persons of quality. This is the reward of genius. Let us forget that he was the son of a Custom House servant, and that he proved unequal to the duties of a clerk. He has now risen. We will welcome one whose name will in the future add lustre to our town.'

The Vicar shook his head. 'Trash,' he murmured, 'trash.'

'Well, gentlemen, I will proceed to read the letter.'

He unfolded it, and began with a sonorous 'Hum.'

'"Honoured Sir,"' he repeated the words. '"Honoured Sir,"—the letter, gentlemen, is addressed to myself—ahem! to myself. "I have recently heard of a discovery which will probably affect in a manner so vital the interests of my beloved native town, that I feel it my duty to communicate the fact to you without delay. I do so to you rather than to my esteemed patron, the Worshipful the Mayor, once my master, or to Captain Crowle, or to any of those who subscribed for my volume of Miscellany Poems, because the matter specially and peculiarly concerns yourself as a physician, and as the fortunate owner of the spring or well which is the subject of the discovery." The subject of the

discovery, gentlemen. My well—mine.' He went on: '"You are aware, as a master in the science of medicine, of the curative properties of various spas or springs in the country —the names of Bath, Tunbridge Wells, and Epsom are familiar to you; so doubtless are those of Hampstead and St. Chad's, near London. It now appears that a certain learned physician, having reason to believe that similar waters exist, as yet unsuspected, at King's Lynn, has procured a jar of the water from your own well—that in your garden." My well, gentlemen, in my own garden! "And, having subjected it to a rigorous examination, has discovered that it contains, to a much higher degree than any other well hitherto known to exist in this country, qualities, or ingredients, held in solution, which make this water sovereign for the cure of rheumatism, asthma, gout, and all disorders due to ill humours or vapours—concerning which I am not competent so much as to speak to one of your learning and skill."'

'He has,' said the schoolmaster, 'the pen of a ready writer. He balances his periods. I taught him. So far he was an apt pupil.'

The doctor resumed.

'"This discovery hath already been announced in the public journals. I send you an extract containing the news." I read this extract, gentlemen.'

It was a slip of printed paper, cut from one of the diurnals of London, and ran as follows:—

'"It has been discovered that at King's Lynn, in the county of Norfolk, there exists a deep well of clear water, whose properties, hitherto undiscovered, form a sovereign specific for rheumatism and many similar disorders. Our physicians have already begun to recommend the place as a Spa, and it is understood that some of their patients have resolved upon betaking themselves to this newly-

discovered cure. The distance from London is no greater than that of Bath. The roads, it is true, are not so good, but at Cambridge it is possible for those who do not travel in their own carriages to proceed by way of barge or tilt boat down the Cam and the Ouse, a distance of only forty miles, which in the summer should prove a pleasant journey."

'So far,' the doctor informed us, 'for the printed intelligence. I now proceed to finish the letter. "Among others my patron, the Right Honourable the Earl of Fylingdale, has been recommended by his physician to try the newly-discovered waters of Lynn as a preventive of gout. He is a gentleman of the highest rank, fashion, and wealth, who honours me with his confidence. It is possible that he may even allow me to accompany him on his journey. Should he do so I shall look forward to the honour of paying my respects to my former patrons. He tells me that other persons of distinction are also going to the same place, with the same objects, during the coming summer."'

'You hear, gentlemen,' said the doctor, looking round, 'what did I say? Wealth for all—for all. So. Let me continue. "Sir, I would with the greatest submission venture to point out the importance of this event to the town. The nobility and gentry of the neighbourhood should be immediately made acquainted with this great discovery; the clergy of Ely, Norwich, and Lincoln; the members of the University of Cambridge; the gentlemen of Boston, Spalding, and Wisbech should all be informed. It may be expected that there will be such a concourse or flocking to Lynn as will bring an accession of wealth as well as fame to the borough of which I am a humble native. I would also submit that the visitors should find Lynn provided with the amusements necessary for a Spa.

I mean music; the assembly; a pump-room; a garden; the Ball; the masquerade; the card-room; clean lodgings; good wine and fish, flesh and fowl in abundance. I humbly ask forgiveness for these suggestions, and I have the honour to remain, Honoured Sir, your most obedient humble servant, with my grateful service to all the gentlemen who subscribed to my verses, and thereby provided me with a ladder up which to rise.—SAMUEL SEMPLE."'

At this moment the bowl of punch was brought in and placed before the Captain with a tray of glasses. The doctor folded his letter, replaced it in his pocket-book, and took off his spectacles.

'Gentlemen, you have heard my news. Captain Crowle, may I request that you permit the Society to drink with me to the Prosperity of the Spa—the Prosperity of the Spa—the Spa of Lynn.'

'Let us drink it,' said the Captain. 'To the newly-discovered Spa. But this Samuel—Samuel Semple—the name sticks.'

The toast was received with the greatest satisfaction, and then, when the punch was buzzed about, there arose a conversation so lively and so loud that heads looked out of windows in the square wondering what in the world had happened with the Society. Not a quarrel, surely. Nay, there was no uplifting of voices; there was no anger in the voices; nor was it the sound of mirth; there was no note of merriment; nor was it a drunken loosening of the tongue; such a thing with this company was impossible. It was simply a conversation in which all spoke at the same time over an event which interested and excited all alike. Everybody contributed something.

'We must have a committee to prepare for the accommodation of the visitors.'

'We must put up a pump-room.'

'We must engage a dipper.'

'We must make walks across the fields.'

'There must be an assembly with music and dancing.'

'There must be a card-room.'

'There must be a long room for those who wish to walk about and to converse—with an orchestra.'

'There must be public breakfasts and suppers.'

'We shall want horns to play in the evening.'

'We must have glass lamps of variegated colours to hang among the trees.'

'I will put up the pump-room,' said the doctor, 'in my garden, over the well.'

'We must look to our lodgings. The beds in our inns are for the most part rough-hewn boards on trestles, with flock beds full of knobs and sheets that look like leather. The company will look for bedsteads and feather beds.'

'The ladies will ask for curtains. We must give them what they are accustomed to enjoy.'

'We must learn the fashionable dances.'

'We must talk like beaux and dress like the gentlefolk of Westminster.'

The Captain looked on, meanwhile whispering in my ear from time to time. 'Samuel is a liar,' he said. 'I know him to be a liar. Yet why should he lie about a thing of so much importance? If he tells the truth, Jack—I know not; I misdoubt the fellow—yet, again, he may tell the truth. And why should he lie, I say? Then—one knows not—among the company we may even find a husband for the girl. As for taking her to London—but we shall see.'

So he shook his head, not wholly carried away like the rest, but with a certain amount of hope. And then, waiting for a moment when the talk flagged a bit, he spoke.

'Gentlemen, if this news is true, and surely Sam Semple

would not invent it, then the old town is to have another great slice of luck. We have our shipping and our trade; these have made many of us rich, and given an honest livelihood to many more. The Spa should bring in, as the doctor has told us, wealth in another channel. I undertake to assure you that we shall rise to the occasion. The town shall show itself fit to receive and to entertain the highest company. We tarpaulins are too old to learn the manners of fashion. But we have men of substance among us who will lay out money with such an object; we have gentlemen of family in the country round; we have young fellows of spirit'—he clapped me on the shoulder—'who will keep up the gaieties; and, gentlemen, we have maidens among us as blooming as any in the great world. We shall not be ashamed of ourselves, or of our girls.'

These words created a profound sigh of satisfaction. The men of substance would rise to the occasion.

Before the bowl was out a committee was appointed, consisting of Captain Crowle, the Vicar of St. Margaret's, the Curate of St. Nicholas—the two clergyman being appointed as having imbibed at the University of Cambridge some tincture of the fashionable world—and the doctor. This important body was empowered to make arrangements for the reception and for the accommodation and entertainment of the illustrious company expected and promised. It was also empowered to circulate in the country round about the news of the extraordinary discovery, and to invite all the rheumatic and the gouty, the asthmatic, and everybody afflicted with any kind of disease, to repair immediately to Lynn Regis, there to drink the sovereign waters of the Spa.

'It only remains, gentlemen,' said the doctor in conclusion, 'that I myself should submit the water of my well to an examination.' He did not think it necessary to inform

the company that he had received from Samuel Semple an analysis of the water stating the ingredients and their proportions as made by the anonymous physician of London. 'Should it prove, of which I have little doubt, that the water is such as has been described by my learned brother in medicine, I shall inform you of the fact.'

It was a curious coincidence, though the Committee of Reception was not informed of the fact, that the doctor's analysis exactly agreed with that sent to him.

It was a memorable evening. For my own part, I know not why, during the reading of the letter my heart sank lower and lower. It was the foreboding of evil. Perhaps it was caused by my knowledge of Sam, of whom I will speak presently. Perhaps it was the thought of seeing the girl whom I loved, while yet I had no hope of winning her, carried off by some sprig of quality, who would teach her to despise her homely friends—the Master Mariners, young and old. I know not the reason. But it was a foreboding of evil, and it was with a heavy heart that I repaired to the quay, and rowed myself back to the ship in the moonlight.

They were going to drink to the next voyage of the *Lady of Lynn*. Why, the lady herself, not her ship, was about to embark on a voyage more perilous—more disastrous—than that which awaited any of her ships. Cruel as is the ocean, I would rather trust myself—and her—to the mercies of the Bay of Biscay at its wildest, than to the tenderness of the crew who were to take charge of that innocent and ignorant lady.

CHAPTER V

THE PORT OF LYNN

This was the beginning of the famous year. I say famous, because to me and to certain others it was certainly a year eventful, while to the people of the town and the county round it was the year of the Spa, which began, ran a brief course, and terminated all in one summer.

Let me therefore speak for a little about the place where these things happened. It is not a mushroom or an upstart town of yesterday, but, on the other hand, a town of venerable antiquity, with many traditions which may be read in books by the curious. It is important on account of its trade, though it is said that in former days its importance was much greater.

I have sailed over many seas; I have put in at many ports; I have taken in cargoes of many countries—the ways of sailors I have found much the same everywhere. And as for the food and the drink and the buildings, I say that Lynn is behind none. Certainly the Port of London, whether at Wapping, or Limehouse, or Shadwell, cannot show anything so fine as the Market Place of Lynn, or St. Margaret's Church, or our Custom House. Nor have I found anywhere people more civil of speech, and more obliging and well disposed, than in my own town, where, apart from the sailors and their quarters, the merchants and shipowners are substantial; trade is always

brisk; the Port is always lively; continually there is a coming and a going; sometimes week after week one ship arrives and a ship puts out; the yards are always busy; the hammer and the anvil resound all day long; carpenters, rope-makers, boat-builders, block-makers, sail-makers, all the people wanted to fit out a ship—they say that a ship is like a woman, in always wanting something—are at work without intermission all the year round, from five in the morning till eight in the evening. They stand at good wages; they live well; they dress warm; they drink of the best. It is a city of great plenty. Wine there is of the most generous, to be had at reasonable price. Have I not myself brought home cargoes from Lisbon of Spanish and Portuguese—strong and heady—rich and sweet? and from Bordeaux of right claret? All the things that come from abroad are here in abundance, brought hither by our ships and distributed by our barges up the river and its tributaries through eight counties at least, serving the towns of Peterborough, Ely, Stamford, Bedford, St. Ives, Huntingdon, St. Neots, Northampton, Cambridge, Bury St. Edmunds, and Thetford. We send them not only wine, but also coals (which come to us, sea-borne, from Newcastle), deal and timber from Norway and the Baltic, iron and implements, sugar, lemons, spices, tea (but there is little of that infusion taken in the county), turpentine, and I know not what; and we receive for export wheat, barley, oats, and grain of all kinds.

In other places you may hear lamentations that certain imported luxuries have given out; I have known the lemons to fail so that the punch was spoiled; or the nutmegs to give out—which is a misfortune for the pudding; or the foreign wine to have been all consumed. Our cellars and our warehouses, however, are always full, there is always wine of every kind; there are always stores of

everything that the cook can want for his most splendid banquet.

Nor are we less fortunate in our food. There is excellent mutton fattened in the Marshland; the bacon of Norfolk is famous; there are no geese like the geese of the fens—they are kept in farmhouses, each in its own hutch, and all driven out to feed in the fens and ditches of the fens. Every day you may see the boy they call the gozzard driving them out of the town in the morning and bringing them home in the evening. Then, since all the country on the west side is lowland reclaimed from the sea, it is, like all such land, full of ponds and haunted by starlings and ducks, widgeon, teal, and other wild birds innumerable, which are shot, decoyed, and caught in great numbers. Add to this that the reclaimed land is most fertile, and yields abundantly of wheat and barley, fruit and vegetables; and that fish are found in plenty in the Wash and outside, and you will own that the town is a kind of Promised Land, where everything that the heart of man can desire is plentiful and cheap, and where the better sort are rich and comfortable, and the baser sort are in good case and contented.

Another circumstance which certain scholars consider fortunate for Lynn is that the modern town abounds with ancient buildings, walls, towers, arches, churches, gateways, fragments which proclaim its antiquity and speak of its former importance. You think, perhaps, that a plain and simple sea-captain has no business to know anything about matters which concern scholars. That is a reasonable objection. The Lord forbid that I should speak as if I knew anything of my own reading! I am but a plain sailor. I have spent most of my life navigating a merchantman. This is an honourable condition. Had I to choose another life upon the world, I would desire of Providence

no higher station and no happier lot. A sea-captain is King; his vessel is an island over which he rules; he is a servant, yet not in a state of servitude; he is dependent, yet is independent; he has no cares about money, for he is well paid; he keeps what hours he pleases; dresses as he likes; eats and drinks as he likes; if he carries passengers he has society. No. Let me not even seem to be pretending to the learning of a scholar. I do but repeat the things which my father was wont to repeat in my hearing. He was for forty years Master of the Grammar School; a Master of Arts of Christ's College, Cambridge: a learned scholar in Latin, Greek, Hebrew, and Chaldee; and, like many of his calling, an antiquary, and one who was most happy when he was poring over old MSS. in the Archives of the Guildhall, and amassing materials, which he did not live to put together, for the history of Lynn Regis, sometime Lynn Episcopi. The collections made by him still lie among the chests where the Corporation keep their papers. They will doubtless be found there at some future time, and will serve for some other hand engaged upon the same work.

It is not to be expected that among a trading and a shipping community there should be much curiosity on such matters as the past history of their borough; the Charter which it obtained from kings; the creation of a mayor; the destruction of the monasteries when the glorious Reformation restored the sunlight of the Gospel and of freedom to this happy land. For the most part my father worked without encouragement save from the Vicar of St. Margaret's, the Rev. Mark Gentle, S.T.P., to whose scholarly mind the antiquities and charters and leases of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries were of small account indeed compared with a newly found coin of an obscure Roman usurper; or an inscription on a Roman milestone,

or the discovery of a Roman urn. Yet my father would willingly discourse upon the subject, and, indeed, I think that little by little he communicated to me the whole of his knowledge, so that I became that rare creature, a sailor versed in antiquity and history; one to whom the streets and old buildings of Lynn spoke in a language unknown by the people, even unheard by them.

It pleases me to recall the tall form of my father; his bent shoulders; his wig for the most part awry; his round spectacles; his thin face. In school he was a figure of fear always terrible, wielding the rod of office with Justice Rhadamanthine, and demanding, with that unrelenting alternative, things impossible in grammar. In school hours he was a very Jupiter, a thundering Jupiter; our school was an ancient hall with an open timber roof in which his voice rolled and echoed backwards and forwards. Nor did he spare his only son. In consequence of some natural inability to cope with the niceties of syntax, I was often compelled to become a warning and an admonition to the rest. I have sometimes, since those days, in considering things during the night-watch, asked myself why men of tender hearts force their children to undergo this fierce discipline of grammar—a thing instantly forgotten when a boy goes to sea; and I have thought that perhaps it was invented and encouraged by divines in order that boys might learn something of the terrors of the Law Divine. Out of school, however, no child ever had a parent more indulgent or more affectionate. The post of schoolmaster is honourable and one that should be desired, yet I have sometimes wished, when the disagreeable moments of wishing were upon me, that the hand of the executioner had belonged to some other boy's father—say, the father of Sam Semple.

I will tell you how he used to talk. I remember one

'LOOK, BOY,' HE SAID.

day—it might be yesterday—he was standing on the Lady's Mount, and looking down upon the gardens and fields which now lie between the ancient walls and the modern town. 'Look, boy,' he said, 'you see fields and gardens; on those fields stood formerly monasteries and convents; these gardens were once enclosed—you may still discern some of the stone walls which surrounded them, for monk and friar. All the friars were here, so great was the wealth of the town. On that green field behind the Church of St. Nicholas was the house of Austin Friars; some fragments of these buildings have I discovered built into the houses on the west side of the field; I should like to pull down the modern houses in order to display those fragments; almost at our feet lay the house of the Black Friars; yonder to the south, between the road to the gate and the river Var, was the friary of the White Friars, or Carmelites; there is the tower of the Grey Friars, who were Franciscans. On the south side of St. Margaret's there are walls and windows, with carved mullions and arches—they belong to a college of priests, or perhaps a Benedictine house—there must have been Benedictines in the town; or perhaps they belonged to a nunnery; many nunneries stood beside parish churches.

'This is part of the wall of the town. 'Tis a pity that it should fall into decay, but when walls are no longer wanted for defence they are neglected. First the weather loosens the stones of the battlements; or perhaps they fall into the moat; or the people take them away for building. I wonder how much of the wall of Lynn is built into the churches and the houses, and the garden walls; then the whole face of the wall disappears; then if it is a Roman wall there is left a core of concrete as in London Wall, which I have seen here and there where the houses are not built against it. But here is a point which I cannot get

over. The wall of Lynn is two miles long; that of London is three miles long, as I am credibly informed by Stow and others. Was, then, the town of Lynn at any time able to raise and defend a wall two miles in length? It seems incredible. Yet why build a wall longer than could be defended? Were these fields and gardens once streets between the religious houses? Certain it is that Lynn Episcopi, as it was then called, was formerly a very busy place, yet, I apprehend, more busy than at present in proportion only to the increased wealth and population of the country.'

So he would talk. To me, I suppose, because he could never find anybody else who would listen to him. Those who read this page will very likely resemble the company to whom my father ventured upon some such discourse of ancient things. They would courteously incline their heads: they would take a drink; they would sigh; they would say, 'Why, sir, since you say so, doubtless it is so. No one is likely to dispute the point; but if you think upon it, the time is long ago, and . . . I think, neighbours, the wind has shifted a point to the nor'-east.'

The town preserves, in spite of neglect and oblivion, more of the appearance of age than most towns. The Guildhall, where they show the sword and the silver cup of King John, is an ancient and noteworthy building; there are the old churches; there are almshouses and hospitals; there is a Custom House, which the Hollanders enviously declare must have been brought over from their country and set up here, so much does it resemble their own buildings. Our streets are full of remains. Here a carving in marble; here a window of ancient shape, cut in stone; here a piece of carved work from some ancient chantry chapel; here a deserted and mouldering court; here a house overhanging, gabled, with carved front; here

a courtyard, with an ancient house built round it; and with the narrow streets such as one finds only in the most ancient parts of our ancient cities. We have still our winding lanes, with their irregularities; houses planted sideways as well as fronting the street; an irregular alignment; gables instead of a flat coping; casement windows not yet transformed by the modern sash; our old taverns; our old walls; our old market-places; and the ancient bridges which span the four streams running through the midst of our town. By the riverside you may find the sailors and the craftsmen who belong to a seaport; at the Custom House you may meet the merchants and the shippers; in the market-places you may find the countrymen and the country-women — they talk an uncouth language, and their manners are rough, but they are honest; and if you go to the Church of St. Margaret's or St. Nicholas any day for morning prayers, but especially on Sunday, you may find among the congregation maidens and matrons in rich attire, the former as beautiful as in any town or country may be met; the latter stately and dignified and gracious withal.

CHAPTER VI

THE MAID OF LYNN

My earliest recollection as a child shows me Captain Crowle, fully-wigged, with a white silk cravat round his neck, the lace ends hanging down before, a crimson silk sash to his sword, long lace ruffles, his brown coat with silver buttons, his worsted hose, and his shoes with silver clocks. In my memory he is always carrying his hat under his arm; a stout stick always dangles from his wrist, in readiness; and he always presents the same honest face, weather-beaten, ruddy, lined, with his keen eyes under thick eyebrows, and his nose long and broad and somewhat arched—such a nose as lends authority to a man. In other words, I never saw any change in the Captain, though when I first remember him he must have been fifty-five, and when he ceased to be seen in his old haunts he was close upon eighty.

I have seen, however, and I remember, many changes in the Captain's ward. She is a little thing of two or three at first; then she is a merry child of six; next she is a school-girl of ten or eleven; she grows into a maiden of sixteen, neither girl nor woman; she becomes a woman of eighteen. I remember her at every stage. Strange to say, I do not remember her between those stages.

Molly had the misfortune to lose her father in infancy.

He was carried off, I believe, by small-pox. He was a ship-owner, and general merchant of the town, and was generally reputed to be a man of considerable means. At his death he bequeathed the care of his widow and his child to his old servant, Captain John Crowle, who had been in the service of the house since he was apprenticed as a boy. He directed, further, that Captain Crowle should conduct the business for the child, who, by his will, was to inherit the whole of his fortune, whatever that might prove to be, on coming of age, after subtracting certain settlements for his widow.

It was most fortunate for the child that her guardian was the most honest person in the world. He was a bachelor; he was bound by ties of gratitude to the House which he had served; he had nothing to do and nothing to think about except the welfare of the child.

I would have no secrets with my reader. Let it be known, therefore, that on looking into the position of affairs, the executor found that there was a much greater fortune for his ward than anyone, even the widow, ever guessed. There were houses in the town; there were farms in Marshland; there was money placed out on mortgage; there were three or four tall ships chiefly in the Lisbon trade; and there were boxes full of jewels, gold chains, and trinkets, the accumulation of three or four generations of substantial trade. He kept this knowledge to himself; then, as the expenses of the household were small, and there was always a large balance after the year in favour of the House, he went on adding ship to ship, house to house, and farm to farm, besides putting out money on the security of mortgage, so that the child, no one suspecting, grew richer and richer, until by the time she was eighteen—but only the Captain knew it—she had become the richest heiress not only in the town of Lynn,

but also in the whole county of Norfolk, and even, I verily believe, in the whole country.

I think that the Captain must have been what is called a good man of business by nature. A simple sailor, one taught to navigate, to take observations, to keep a log, and to understand a chart, is not supposed to be thereby trained for trade. But it must have been a far-seeing man who boldly launched out into new branches and sent whalers to the Arctic seas, ships to trade in the Baltic, and ships into the Mediterranean, as well as ships in the old trade for which Lynn was always famous—that with Lisbon for wine. He it was who enlarged the quay and rebuilt the Common Stath Yard. His counting-house—it was called his, and he was supposed to be at least a partner—was filled with clerks, and it was counted good fortune by the young men of the place to enter his service, whether as 'prentices on board his ships, or as book-keepers in his counting-house, or as supercargoes or pursers in his fleet. For my own part, it was always understood between us that I, too, was to enter his service, but as a sailor, not as a clerk. This I told him as a little boy, with the impudence of childhood. He laughed. But he remembered, and reminded me from time to time. 'Jack is to be a sailor—Jack will have none of your quill-driving—Jack means to walk his own quarterdeck. I shall live to give Jack his sword and his telescope'—and so on, lest perchance I should forget and fall off, and even accept the Vicar's offer to get me a scholarship at some college of Cambridge, so that I might take a degree and become my father's usher, and presently succeed him as master of the grammar school. 'Learning,' said the Captain, 'is a fine thing, but the command of a ship is a finer. Likewise, it is doubtless a great honour to be a Master of Arts, such as your father; but, my lad, a rope's end is, to my mind,

a better weapon than a birch.' And so on. For while he knew how to respect the learning of a scholar, as he respected the piety of the Vicar, he considered the calling of the sailor more delightful, even though not so highly esteemed by the world.

There were plenty of children in the town of Lynn to play with; but it came about in some way or other, perhaps because I was always a favourite with the Captain and was encouraged to go often to the house, that Molly became my special playfellow. She was two years younger than myself, but, as she was forward in growth and strength, the difference was not a hindrance, while there was no game or amusement pleasing to me which did not please her. For instance, every boy of Lynn, as soon as he can handle a scull, can manage a dinghy; and as soon as he can haul a rope, can sail a boat. For my own part, I can never remember the time when I was not in my spare time out on the river. I would sail up the river, along the low banks of the sluggish stream up and down which go the barges which carry the cargoes of our ships to the inland towns and return for more. There are also tilt boats coming down the river which, like the waggons on the road, are full of passengers, sailors, servants, soldiers, craftsmen, apprentices, and the like. Or I would row down the river with the current and the tide as far as the mouth where the river flows into the Wash. Then I would sail up again, watching the ships tacking across the stream in their slow upward progress to the port. Or I would go fishing and bring home a basket full of fresh fish for the house; or I would paddle about in a dinghy among the ships, watching them take in or discharge cargo, or receive from the barges alongside the casks of pork and beef, of rum and beer and water, for the next voyage—happy, indeed, if I could get permission to tie up the painter to the rope ladder hang-

ing over the side and so climb up and ramble over every part of the ship. And I knew every ship that belonged to the port—every Dutchman which put in with cheese and tallow, hardware and soft goods; every Norwegian that brought deal; I knew them all and when they were due, and their tonnage and the name of the captain.

More than this, Molly knew as much as I did. She was as handy with her sculls; she knew every puff of wind and where to expect it at the bend of the river; she was as handy with the sails. While her mother made her a notable housewife and taught her to make bread, cakes, puddings, and pies; to keep the still-room; to sew, and make, and mend; to brew the ale, both the strong and the small, and the punch for the Captain's friends at Christmas and other festivals—while, I say, this part of Molly's education was not neglected, it was I who made her a sailor, so that there was nowhere in the place anyone—man, or boy or girl—who was handier with a boat or more certain with a sail than Molly. And I know not which of these two accomplishments pleased her guardian the more. That she should become a good housewife was necessary; that she should be a handy sailor was an accomplishment which, because it was rare in a girl and belonged to the work of the other sex, seemed to him a proper and laudable object of pride.

The Captain, as you have already learned, nourished a secret ambition. When I was still little more than a boy, he entrusted his secret to me. Molly's mother, the good homely body who was so notable a housekeeper, and knew nothing, as she desired to know nothing, concerning the manners and customs of gentlefolk, was not consulted. Nor did the good woman even know how great an heiress her daughter had become. Now, the Captain's ambition was to make his ward, by means of her fortune, a great

lady. He knew little, poor man, of what was meant by a great lady; but he wanted the heiress of such great wealth to marry some man who would lift her out of the rank and condition to which she was born. It was a fatal ambition, as you shall learn. Now, being wise after the event, and quite able to lock the door after the horse has been stolen, I can understand that with such an ambition the Captain's only plan was to have taken the girl away, perhaps to Norwich, perhaps to London itself; to have placed her under the care of some respectable gentlewoman; to have had her taught all the fashionable fal-lals, with the graces and the sprawls and the antics of the fashionable world, and to let it be buzzed abroad that she was an heiress, and then, after taking care to protect her against adventurers, to find a man after his own mind of station high enough to make the girl's fortune equal to his own; not to overshadow it; and not to dazzle him with possibilities of spending. However, it is easy to prophesy, after the event, what might have been done.

What was done, you understand. At nineteen, Molly was a fine tall girl, as strong as any man, her arms stout and muscular like mine; her face rosy and ruddy with the bloom of health; her eyes blue, and neither too large nor too small, but fearless; her head and face large; her hair fair and blowing about her head with loose curls; her figure full; her neck as white as snow; her hands large rather than small, by reason of the rowing and the handling of the ropes, and by no means white; her features were regular and straight; her mouth not too small, but to my eyes the most beautiful mouth in the world, the lips full, and always ready for a smile, the teeth white and regular. In a word, to look, at as fine a woman, not of the delicate and dainty kind, but strong, tall, and full of figure, as one may wish for. As to her disposition, she was the

most tender, affectionate, sweet soul that could be imagined; she was always thinking of something to please those who loved her; she spared her mother and worked for her guardian; she was always working at something; she was always happy; she was always singing. And never, until the Captain told her, did she have the least suspicion that she was richer than all her friends and neighbours—nay, than the whole town of Lynn, with its merchants and shippers and traders, all together.

You think that I speak as a lover. It is true that I have always loved Molly; there has never been any other woman in the world for whom I have ever felt the least inclination or affection. She possessed my whole soul as a child; she has it still—my soul—my heart—my whole desire—my all. I will say no more in her praise, lest I be thought to exaggerate.

Let me return for a moment to our childhood. We ran about together; we first played in the garden; we then played in the fields below the wall; we climbed over upon what is left of the wall; from the top of the Grey Friars' Tower, from the chapel on the Lady's Mount, we would look out upon the broad expanse of meadows which were once covered over at every high-tide; there were stories which were told by old people of broken dams and of floods and inundations; children's imagination is so strong that they can picture anything. I would pretend that the flood was out again, that my companion was carried away in a hencoop, and that I was swimming to her assistance. Oh! we had plays and pretences enough. If we went up the river, there was beyond—what we could never reach—a castle, with a giant who carried off girls and devoured them. He carried off my companion. Heavens! How I rushed to the rescue, and, with nothing but the boathook, encountered and slaughtered him. Or if we went down

the river as far as the mouth, where it falls into the Ouse, we would remember the pirates, and how they seized on girls and took them off to their caves to work for them. How many pirates did I slay in defence and rescue of one girl whom they dared to carry off!

Or we rambled about the town, lingering on the quays watching the ships and the sailors and the workmen; and sometimes in summer evenings, when from some tavern with its red curtain across the window came the scraping of a fiddle and the voices of those who sang and the stamping of those who danced, we would look in at the open door and watch the sailors within who looked so happy. Nobody can ever be so happy as sailors ashore appear to be; it is only the joy of a moment, but when one remembers it one imagines that it must have been the joy of a lifetime. You think that it was a bad thing for children to look on at sailors and to listen to their conversation, if one may use the word of such talk as goes on among the class. You are wrong. These things do not hurt children, because they do not understand. Half the dangers in the world, I take it, come from knowledge, only the other half from ignorance. Everybody knows the ways and the life of Jack ashore. Children, however, see only the outside of things. The fiddler in the corner puts his elbow into the tune, the men get up and dance the hornpipe, the girls dance to the men, setting and jetting and turning round and round, and all with so much mirth and good nature and so much kindness altogether, and so much singing and laughing, that there can be no more delightful entertainment for children than to look on at a sailor's merrymaking behind the red curtain of the tavern window.

I recall one day. It was in the month of December, in the afternoon, and close upon sunset. The little maid

was about eight, and I was about ten. We were together as usual; we had been on the river, but it was cold, and so we came ashore and were walking hand-in-hand along the street they call Pudding Lane, which leads from the Common Stath Yard to the Market Place. In this lane there stands a sailors' tippling-house, which is, I dare say, in all respects such a house as sailors desire, provided and furnished according to their wants and wishes. As we passed, the place being already lit up with two or three candles in sconces, the door being wide open, and the mingled noise of fiddle, voices, and feet announcing the assemblage of company, Molly pulled me by the hand and stopped to look in. The scene was what I have already indicated. The revelry of the evening had set in; everybody was drinking, one was dancing, the fiddler was playing lustily.

We should have looked on for a minute and left them. But one of the sailors recognised Molly. Springing to his feet, he made a respectful leg and saluted the child. 'Mates,' he cried, ''tis our owner! The little lady owns the barky. What shall we do for her?'

Then they all sprang to their feet with a huzza for the owner and another for the ship, and, if you will believe it, their rough foc'sle hands in half a minute had the child on the table in a chair like a queen. She sat with great dignity, understanding in some way that these men were in her own service, and that they designed no harm or affright to her, but only to do her honour. Therefore she was not in any fear, but smiled graciously; for my own part, I followed and stood at the table, thinking that perhaps these fellows were proposing some piratical abduction, and resolving on miracles of valour, if necessary.

Then they made offerings. One man pulled a red silk

handkerchief from his neck and laid it on her lap, and another lugged a box of sweetmeats from his pocket—it came from Lisbon, but was made, I believe, in Morocco by the Moors. A third had a gold ring on his finger—everybody knows the extravagances of sailors—which he drew off and placed in her hand. Another offered a glass of punch. The little maid did what she had so often seen the Captain do. She looked round and said, 'Your good health, all the company,' and put her lips to the glass, which she then returned. And another offered to dance, and the fiddler drew his bow across the catgut—it is a sound which inclines the heart to beat and the feet to move whenever a sailor hears it.

'I have seen you dance,' said Molly; 'let the fiddler play, and you shall see me dance.'

I never thought she would have had so much spirit. For, you see, I had taught her to dance the hornpipe—every boy in a seaport town can dance the hornpipe; we used to make music out of a piece of thin paper laid over a tortoiseshell comb—it must be a comb of wide teeth, and none of them must be broken; and with this instead of a fiddle we would dance in the garden or in the parlour. But to stand up before a whole company of sailors—who would have thought it? However, she jumped up, and on the table performed her dance with great seriousness and so gracefully that they were all enchanted; they stood around, their mouths open, a broad grin on every face; the women, neglected, huddled together in a corner and were quite silent.

When she had finished, she gathered up her gifts; the silk handkerchief—it came from Calicut, the sweetmeats from Morocco, the gold ring from I know not where. 'Put me down, if you please,' she said. So one of them gently lifted her to the ground. 'I thank you all,' she

curtseyed very prettily. 'I wish you good-night; and when you set sail again, a good voyage.'

So she took my hand and we ran away.

At the age of thirteen I went to sea. Then for ten years I sailed out and home again—sometimes to the Baltic; sometimes to Bordeaux; sometimes to Lisbon. After every voyage I found my former companion grown yet always more lovely and more charming; the time came when we no longer kissed at partings; when we were no longer brother and sister; when, alas! we could not be lovers, because between us lay that great fortune of hers which it would be improper to bestow upon the mate of a merchantman.

Said my father to me once by way of warning, 'Jack, build not hopes that will be disappointed. This maiden is not for thee, but for thy betters. If she were poor—but she is rich—too rich, I fear me, for her happiness. Let us still say in the words of Agur, "Give me neither poverty nor riches." Thou art, as yet, young for thoughts of love. When the time comes, my son, cast your eyes among humble maidens, and find virtues and charms in one of them. But think no more—I say it for thy peace—think no more of Molly. Her great riches are like a high wall built round her to keep thee off, Jack, and others like unto thee.'

They were wise words, but a young man's thoughts are wilful. There was no other maiden in whom I saw either virtues or charms, because Molly among them all was like the silver moon among the glittering stars.

You have heard of the great and unexpected discovery, how the town found itself the possessor of a Spa—and such a Spa!—compared with which the waters of Tunbridge were feeble and those of Epsom not worth

considering. That was in the year 1750, when Molly was already nineteen years of age and no longer a little maid, but a woman grown, as yet without wooers, because, so far, no one had been as yet found fit, in the Captain's eyes, for the hand and the purse of his lovely ward.

CHAPTER VII

THE POET

You have heard the opinions of the Society as to Sam Semple. You have also witnessed the humiliation and the Basting of that young man. Let me tell you more about him before we go on to relate the progress of the conspiracy of which he was the inventor and the spring.

He was the son of one John Semple, who was employed at the Custom House. The boy could look forward, like most of us, to a life of service. He might go to sea, and so become, in due course, 'prentice, mate, and skipper; or he might be sent on board as supercargo; or he might enter the counting-house of a merchant and keep the books; or he might follow his father and become a servant of the Custom House.

He was two years older than myself, and, therefore, so much above me at school. Of all the boys (which alone indicates something contemptible in his nature) he was the most disliked, not by one or two, but by the whole school, not only by the industrious and the well-behaved, but also by the lazy and the vicious.

There is always in every school one boy, at least, who is the general object of dislike; he makes no friends; his society is shunned; he may be feared, but he is hated.

There are, I dare say, many causes for unpopularity; one boy is perhaps a bully who delights to ill-treat the younger and the weaker; one is a braggart; one plays games unfairly; one is apt to offend that nice sense of honour and loyalty which is cultivated by schoolboys; another is treacherous to his comrades; he tells tales, backbites and makes mischief; perhaps he belongs to an inferior station and has bad manners; perhaps he takes mean advantages; perhaps he is a coward who will not fight; perhaps he cannot do the things which boys respect.

Sam Semple was disliked for many of these reasons. He was known to be a tell-tale; he was commonly reported to convey things overheard to the Usher, by means of which that officer was enabled to discover many little plots and plans and so bring their authors to pain and confusion. He was certainly a coward who would never fight it out, but after a grand pretence and flourish would run away at the first blow. But if he would not fight he would bear malice and would take mean revenges; he was a most notorious liar, insomuch that no one would believe any statement made by him, if it could be proved to be connected with his own advantage; he could not play any games, and affected to despise the good old sports of cocking, baiting the bear, drawing the badger, playing at cricket, hockey, wrestling, racing, and the other things that make boys skilful, courageous and hardy. He was, in a word, a poor soft, cowardly creature, more like a girl—and an inferior kind of girl—than an honest lad.

He was much addicted to reading; he would, by choice, sit in a corner reading any book that he could get more willingly than run, jump, row, or race. When we had holidays he would go away by himself, sometimes on the walls if it were summer, or in some sheltered nook if it

were winter, contented to be left alone with his printed page. He borrowed books from my father, who encouraged him in reading, while he admonished him on account of his faults; and from the Vicar, who lent him books, while he warned him against the reports of his character which were noised abroad. Now—I know not how—the boy became secretly inflamed with the ambition of becoming a Poet. How he fell into this pitfall, which ended in his ruin, I know not. Certainly, it was not from any boys in the school, or from any friend in the town, because there are no books in Lynn save those which belong to the parson and the schoolmaster. However, he did conceive the ambition of becoming a poet—secretly at first, because he was naturally ashamed of being such a fool; but it came out. He read poetry for choice, and rather than anything else. Once, I remember, he was flogged for taking a volume of miscellany poems into church instead of the Book of Common Prayer. The boys were astonished at the crime, because, certainly, one would much rather read the Book of Common Prayer—in which one knows what to expect—than a book of foolish rhymes.

I, myself, was the first to find out his ambition. It was in this way. Coming out of school one day I picked up a paper which was blown about the square. It was covered with writing. I read some of it, wondering what it might mean. There was a good deal, and not a word of sense from beginning to end; the writing was all scored out, and corrected over and over again. Thus, not to waste your time over this nonsense, it ran something like this:

'When the refulgent rays of Sol ~~began~~ prevail
early ~~Day~~ Morn
To awakened all the maidens of the dale
Lawn
Drove Morpheus ~~shricking from the beds~~ away
—from the maids and swains.'

and so on. One is ashamed to repeat such rubbish. While I was reading it, however, Sam Semple came running back.

'That paper is mine,' he cried, with a very red face, snatching it out of my hands.

'Well—if it is yours, take it. What does it mean?'

'It's poetry, you fool!'

'If you call me a fool, Sam, you'll get a black eye.' He was three inches taller than myself, as well as two years older; but this was the way all the boys spoke to him.

'You can't understand,' he said. 'None of you can understand. It's poetry, I tell you.'

I told my father, who sent for him, and in my presence admonished him kindly, first ordering him to submit his verses for correction as if they were in Latin. It was after school hours; the room was empty save for us three. My father sat at his desk, where he assumed authority. Outside the schoolroom he was but a gentle creature.

'Boy,' he said, 'as for those verses, I say nothing. They are but immature imitations. You would be a poet. Learn, however, that the lot of him who desires that calling is the hardest and worst that Fate can have in store for an honest man. There are many who can write rhymes; for one who has read Ovid and Virgil, the making of verse is easy. But only one or two here and there, out of millions, are there whose lips are touched with the celestial fire, only one or two whose verses can reach the heart and fire the brain of those who read them.'

'Sir, may not I, too, form one of that small company?' His cheek flamed and his eye brightened. For once Sam was handsome.

'It may be so. I can say nothing to the contrary. Learn, however, that even if genius has been granted, much more will be required. He who would be a great poet must attain if he can, by meditation and self-restraint, to the

great mind. He must be sincere—truthful—courageous—think of that boy; he must meditate. Milton's thoughts were ever on religious and civil freedom; therefore he was enabled to speak as a prophet.'

He gazed upon the face of his scholar; the cheek was sallow again, the eyes dull—upon that mean countenance no sign of noble or of lofty thought. My father sighed and went on.

'It seems, to a young man, a great thing to be a poet. He will escape—will he?—the humiliations of life. He thinks that he will be no man's servant: he will be independent, he will work as his genius inclines him. Alas! he little knows the humiliations of the starveling poet. No man's servant? There is none, believe me, not even the African slave, who has to feel more of the contempts, the scorns, the servitude of the world. Such an one have I known. He had to bend the knee to the patron, who treated him with open scorn; and to the bookseller, who treated him with contempt undisguised. One may be a poet who is endowed with the means of a livelihood. Such is the ingenious Mr. Pope. Or one who has an office to maintain him. Such was the immortal John Milton. But for you, and such as you, my boy, born in a humble condition, and ordained by Providence for that condition, there is no worse servitude than that of a bookseller's hack. Go, boy; think of these things. Continue to write verses if by their aid you may in any way become a better man and more easily attain to the Christian life. But accept, meanwhile, the ruling of Providence, and do thy duty in that station of life to which thou hast been called.'

So saying, he dismissed the boy, who went away downcast and with hanging head.

Then my father turned to me. 'Son,' he said, 'let no

vain repinings fill thy soul. Service is thy lot. It is also mine. It is the lot of every man except those who are born to wealth and rank. I do not envy these, because much is expected of them—a thing which mostly they do not understand. And too many of these are, truth to say, in the Service of Beelzebub. We are all servants of each other; let us perform our service with cheerfulness, and even with joy. The Lord, Who knows what is best for men, hath so ordained that we shall be dependent upon each other in all things. Servants, I say, are we all of each other. We may not escape the common lot—the common servitude.'

Let me return to Sam. At the age of fourteen he was taken from school and placed in a counting-house, where his duty was to clean out, sweep and dust the place every morning; to be at the beck and call of his master; to copy letters and to add up figures. I asked him how he liked this employment.

'It is well enough,' he said, 'until I can go whither I am called. But to serve at adding up the price of barrels of tar and tallow all my life! No, Jack, no. I am made of stuff too good.'

He continued for three years in this employment. We then heard that he had been dismissed for negligence, his master having made certain discoveries that greatly enraged him. He then went on board ship in the capacity of clerk or assistant to the supercargo, but at the end of his first voyage he was sent about his business.

'It is true,' he told me, 'that there were omissions in the books. Who can keep books below, by the light of a stinking tallow candle, when one can lie on the deck in the sun and watch the waves? But these people—these people—among them all, Jack, there is not one who understands a Poet, except your father, and he will have

it that every Poet must starve. Well, there is another way.' But he would tell me no more.

That way he tried and you know it, because it led to the Basting. The day after the adventure in the Captain's garden, Sam put together all he had, borrowed what money his mother would give him, and went off to London by the waggon.

After a while a letter came from him. It was addressed to his mother, who brought it to the school because she could not understand what was meant. Sam (I believe he was lying) said that he had been received into the Company of the Wits; his verse, he said, was regarded with respect at the Coffee House; he was already known to many poets and booksellers; he asked for a small advance of money, and he entreated his mother to let it be known in the town that he was publishing a volume of verse by subscription. His former patrons, he said, would doubtless assist him by giving their names and guineas. The book, he said, would certainly place him among the acknowledged poets of the day—even with Pope and Gay.

There was much difference of opinion as to sending the guineas; but a few of the better sort consented, and in due course received their copies. It was a thin quarto with a large margin. The title-page was as follows:

'MISCELLANY POEMS.

By

Sam Semple,

Gentleman.'

'Gentleman!' said the Vicar. 'How long has Sam been a gentleman? He will next, no doubt, describe himself as Esquire. As for the verses—trash—twopenny trash! Alas! And they cost me a guinea!'

CHAPTER VIII

THE OPENING OF THE SPA

The wonderful letter from Sam Semple was received in April. No one from the outset questioned his assertions. This seems wonderful; but they could only be proved by a letter to London or a journey thither. Now, our merchants had correspondents in the City of London, but not in its fashionable quarters, and nothing is more certain than that the merchants of London concern themselves not at all with the pursuits of fashion or even with the gatherings of the wits in the coffee-house. As for the journey to London, no one will willingly undertake it unless he is compelled. You may go by way of Ely and Cambridge, but the road, nearly all the way to Cambridge, lies through the soft and treacherous fen, where, if a traveller escape being bogged a hundred times, he will probably acquire an ague which will trouble him for many days afterwards; or you may go by way of Swaff'ham and East Dereham, through Norwich. By this way there are no fens, but the road to Norwich is practicable only by broad-wheeled waggons or on horseback, and I doubt if the forty miles could be covered in less than three days. At Norwich, it is true, there is a better road, and a stage coach which runs upon it and carries passengers to London in twelve hours.

It is, therefore, a long and tedious journey from Lynn to London, and one not to be undertaken without strong reasons. Then, even if the 'Society' had entertained suspicions, and deputed one or more to make that journey and to inquire as to the truth of this letter, how and where, in so vast a city, would one begin the inquiry?

The letter, therefore, was received without the least suspicion. Yet it was from beginning to end an artfully concocted lie—part of a conspiracy: an invention devised by the desire for revenge; an ingenious device—let us give the devil his due—by one whose only weapon was his cunning.

The time was also favourable, because the world is always eager to learn of some new Spa—some spring whose waters cure every disease that afflicts mankind.

Every man of the 'Society' went home brimful of the discovery. The next day the doctor's garden was crowded with people, all pressing together, trampling over his currant and gooseberry bushes, drawing up the bucket without cessation in order to taste the water which was to cure all diseases—even like the Pool of Bethesda. Many among them had used this water all their lives without discovering any peculiarity in taste—in fact, as if it had been ordinary water conferred upon man by Providence for the brewing of his beer and the making of his punch and the washing of his linen. Now, however, so great is the power of faith, they drank it as it came out of the well—a thing abhorrent to most people, who cannot abide plain water. They held it up to the light, admiring its wonderful clearness; they called attention to the beads of air rising in the glass as a plain proof of its health-giving qualities; they smacked their lips over it, detecting the presence of unknown ingredients; those who were already rheumatic resolved to drink it every day at frequent

THE DOCTOR'S GARDEN WAS CROWDED WITH PEOPLE.

intervals; even after a single draught they felt relief in their joints; they declared that the rheumatic pains were subsiding rapidly—nay, were already gone; and they rejoiced, so potent was the water, or their faith; just as if they were driving an unwelcome guest out through an open door.

The doctor made haste to issue and to print his own examination of the water. In this document, as I have told you, he very remarkably agreed with the analysis sent down by the egregious Samuel. He appended to his list of ingredients certain cases which he indicated by initials in which the water had proved beneficial; most of them at the outset were the cases of those who, on the first day, found relief from a single glass. Many more cases afterwards occurred.

After the town, the country. The report of the valuable discovery spread rapidly. The farmer folk who brought their produce, pigs, sheep, poultry, and cattle to our markets carried the news home with them; the whole town, indeed, in a few hours was, as they say, all agog with the discovery, and eager, even down to the foc'sle seamen, to drink of a well which was by this time reported among the ignorant class not only to cure, but also to prevent diseases. Then gentlemen began to ride in; on market-day there are always gentlemen in the town; they have an ordinary of their own at the Crown; they were at first incredulous, but they would willingly taste of the spring. As fresh water was comparatively strange to them, it is not surprising that some of them detected an indescribable taste which they were readily persuaded to believe was proof of a medicinal character. They were followed by ladies also curious to taste, to prove, and in many cases to be cured.

Meantime everybody, both of the town and the country,

rejoiced at hearing that it had been decided to take advantage of the discovery in order to convert Lynn Regis, previously esteemed as on the same level as Gosport in the South of England, or Wapping by the Port of London, into a place of fashionable resort and another Bath or Tunbridge Wells. It was difficult, however, to believe that the old town, with its narrow and winding streets, its streams, its bridges, its old decayed courts and ancient pavements, could accommodate itself to the wants and the taste, or even the presence, of the polite world.

Then the news spread further afield. The Reverend Canons in their secluded Close beside their venerable Cathedral—whether at Peterborough, Lincoln, Ely, or Norwich—heard the story, magnified and exaggerated; how at Lynn had been found a spring of water that miraculously healed all wounds, cured all diseases, and made the halt to run and the cripple to stand. Better than all, it restored the power of drinking port wine to old divines who had been compelled by their infirmities to give up that generous wine.

In their great colleges, a world too wide for the young men who entered them as students, the Fellows heard the news, and talked about the discovery in the dull combination-rooms, where the talk was mainly of the rents and the dinners, the last brew at the college brewery, yesterday's cards, or the approaching vacancy in a college living. They, too, pricked up their ears at the news, because to them, as well as to their reverend brethren of the Cathedral, gout and rheumatism were deadly enemies. If only Providence would remove from mankind those two diseases, which plague and pester those to whom their lives would otherwise be full of comfort and happiness, cheered by wine and punch, stayed and comforted by the good things ready to the hand of the cook and the housewife!

And from all the towns around—from Boston, Spalding, Wisbech, Bury, Wells—there came messengers and letters of inquiry, all asking if the news was true—if people had been already treated and already cured—if lodgings were to be had, and so forth.

And then the preparations began. The committee went from house to house encouraging and stimulating the people to make ready for such an incursion as the place had never before known, even at Fair time, and promising a golden harvest. Who would not wish to share in such a harvest?

First, lodgings had to be got ready—they must be clean at least and furnished with necessaries. People at the Spa do not ask for great things in furniture—they do not desire to sit in their lodgings, which are only for sleeping and dressing—a blind in the window or a curtain, to keep out the sun and prying eyes—a bed—a chair—a cupboard—a looking-glass—a table—not even the most fashionable lady asks for more, except that the bed be soft and the wainscot and floor of the room be clean. The better houses would be kept for the better sort; the sailors' houses by the Common Stath and the King's Stath would do for the visitors' servants, who could also eat and drink in the taverns of the riverside. Houses deserted and suffered to fall into decay in the courts of the town were hastily repaired; the roofs patched up; the windows replaced; the doors and woodwork painted. Everywhere rooms were cleaned; beds were put up; all the mattresses, all the pillows, all the blankets and sheets in the town were bought up, and more were ordered from Boston and other places accessible by river or by sea. Certainly the town had never before had such a cleaning, while the painters worked all night, as well as all day, to get through their orders.

It was next necessary to provide supplies for the multi-

tude, when they should arrive. I have spoken of the plenty and abundance of everything in the town of Lynn. The plenty is due to the great fertility of the reclaimed land, which enables the farmers to grow more than they can sell, for want of a market. There is sent abroad, as a rule, to the Low Countries, much of the produce of the farms; there was, therefore, no difficulty in persuading the farmers to hold their hands for a week or two, and, when the company began to arrive, to send into the town quantities of provisions of all kinds—pork, bacon, mutton, beef, poultry, eggs, vegetables, and milk. Boats were engaged for the conveyance of these stores down the river. There would be provided food in abundance. And as for drink, there was no difficulty at all in a town which imported whole cargoes of wine every year.

I must not forget the preparation made in the churches. There are two in Lynn; ancient and venerable churches both. I believe that they were always much larger than was ever wanted, considering the number of the people; but in Norfolk the churches are all too large, being so built for the greater praise and glory of God. However, both in St. Margaret's and in St. Nicholas the congregations had long since shrunk, so that there were wide spaces between the walls and the pews. These spaces were now filled up with new pews, for the accommodation of the expected invasion of visitors. I confess that I admire the simple faith in the coming success of the Spa, which at this time animated not only those most interested, as the doctor himself, but also the people of the town, who knew nothing except what they were told, namely, that the well in the doctor's garden had properties which were sovereign against certain diseases, and that all the world had learned this fact, and were coming to be cured.

There were, next, the public preparations. The necessity of despatch caused the structures to be of wood, which, however, when brightly painted, may produce a more pleasing effect than brick. First, there was the Pump Room. This was built, of course, over the well in the doctor's garden, which it almost covered. It was a square or oblong building, having the well in one corner, and containing a simple room with large sash windows, unfurnished, save for a wooden bench running round the wall and two others in the middle of the room. The water was pumped up fresh and cool—it was really a very fine well of water, always copious—into a large basin; a long counter ran across the room in front of the basin; the counter was provided with glasses of various sizes, and behind the counter were two girls, hired as dippers. The doctor's door opened out of the Pump Room so as to afford readiness and convenience for consultation.

Lastly, it was necessary to provide for the amusement of the visitors. Everybody knows that for one person who visits a Spa for health, there are ten who visit it for the amusements and the pleasures and entertainments provided at these places. I have mentioned the open fields within the walls of the town, which were anciently covered with the buildings and the gardens of the monks and friars and the nuns. They are planted in some places with trees; for instance, below the Lady's Mount, in which is the ancient chapel, there lie fields on which now stand many noble trees. The Committee chose this spot for the construction of the Assembly Rooms. They first inclosed a large portion with a wooden fence; they then laid out the grounds with paths; this done, they erected a Long Room, where the Assembly might be held, with a smooth and level floor, fit for dancing. This room was

also to be the resort of the company in the mornings and when the weather was rainy; adjoining the Long Room was the Card Room, with one long table and several small tables; and the Tea Room, where that beverage could be served with drinks and cordials to counteract its (possibly) evil effects. A gallery at one end was ready for the music —outside there was another building for the music to play on fine evenings.

I must not forget the decoration of the trees. Nothing could be more beautiful than these avenues after nightfall; lamps of various colours hung on festoons from branch to branch; across the avenues in arches; and from tree to tree in parallel lines; these, in the evening, produced an appearance of light and colour that ravished the eye of every beholder. Those who knew London declared that in the day-time this place could compare favourably with the Mall in St. James's Park, and in the evening, after dark, even with the Marylebone Gardens or Vauxhall.

All these preparations were pushed forward with the utmost diligence, so that everything might be ready by the first of May, on which day it was hoped that the season of the Spa would commence. Musicians and singers were engaged; they came from London, bringing good recommendation from some of the pleasure-gardens where they had performed with credit. They were to play for the dancing on the nights of the Assembly; they were also to play in the morning when engaged or bespoke by the gentlemen. They brought with them two or three fiddlers; players on various instruments of brass; and the horns. A dancing master, Mr. Prappet, came from Norwich; he was busy for three weeks before the opening with the young folks of the town, who had never before danced anything more ambitious than a hey or a jig or a country dance, or a frolic round the Maypole. Mr.

Prappet was also engaged as Master of the Ceremonies, a post of great responsibility and distinction.

A theatre is a necessary part of every public place, therefore a troop of strolling players received permission to perform three evenings in the week in the large room of the Duke's Head Inn. I know not what reputation they had as actors, but I can bear witness that they made as much as they could out of a passion, tearing it, so to speak, to rags, and bawling themselves hoarse, so that at least they earned their money, which was not much, I fear.

The cockpit was newly repaired for the lovers of that manly and favourite sport, to which the gentlemen of Norfolk are, as is well known, much addicted. For those who prefer the more quiet games there was the bowling green. And, lastly, for those who incline to the ruder sports there were provided masters of fence who could play with quarter-staff or cudgel; jugglers and conjurers; with rope-dancers, tumblers, merry-andrews, and such folk, together with a tent for their performance.

These details are perhaps below the dignity of history. I mention them in order to let it be understood that the invention — the lying invention — of Sam Semple was bearing the fruit which he most desired in the deception of the whole town. There was never, I believe, so great a deception attempted or carried into effect.

Meantime, the work of the town continued as usual. The port had nothing to do with the Spa. For my own part, I was discharging cargo from the *Lady of Lynn*, and making ready to take in a new cargo. All day I was engaged on board; I slept on board; but in the evening I went ashore and looked on at the preparations and at this new world of fashion and pleasure, the like of which I had never seen before. And, as usual, the ships came into port and dropped anchor off the Stath, or they cleared out

and went down the river with the current and the tide. There were two kinds of life in the place where there had never before been more than one; and while the people in one part of the town had nothing to think of but amusement, those at the other part were, as usual, engaged in their various work. The clerks ran about with their quills behind their ears; the porters rolled the casks; the bargemen brought their unwieldy craft alongside with many loud-sounding oaths and the yohoing without which they can do nothing; and in the taverns the sailors drank and danced and sang, quite unmindful of the people in the streets behind them.

The first arrivals were the gentlefolk from the country round Lynn. They learned when everything would be ready, and they came in as soon as the gardens were laid out, the Long Room was finished, and the first evening announced. They had but a few miles to travel; they engaged the best lodgings and demanded the best provisions. As for wine, they could not have better, because there is no better wine than fills the cellars of our merchants or our vintners.

As these good people came to the Spa it was thought necessary to drink the waters, and this they did with much importance every morning. The natives of Norfolk are, I verily believe, the longest-lived and the most healthy people in the whole world. With the exception of ague —they call it the Bailiff of Marshland—the people in this county seldom suffer from any disorder, and live to a good old age. Yet all, with one consent, began the day by drinking a glass of the cold bright water served in the Pump Room. Very few of them, I say, were troubled with any kind of complaint; though the gentlemen are hard drinkers they are also hard riders, and the open air and cold winds of the morning drive out and dissipate the

fumes of the evening and its wine. For this reason, though many of our sea-captains drink hard at sea, they are never a bit the worse, for the fresh salt air is the finest restorative, and a sailor may be drunk once every twenty-four hours and yet live to a hundred and be none the worse. Most of those who drank the waters had never felt any symptoms of gout or rheumatism, lumbago, sciatica, pleurisy, consumption, or asthma, or any other disease whatever. They flocked to the Pump Room in order to drive away even the possibility of these symptoms. To drink the waters for a month, or even a fortnight, was considered sovereign for the keeping off of all kinds of sickness for at least a whole year to come. It was strange how quite young men and young maidens suddenly conceived this superstitious belief—I can call it nothing but superstition—that those who were perfectly well would be maintained in health—although young people of this age do not commonly contract the diseases above enumerated—by drinking a glass of water every morning. That old men, who will catch at anything that offers to restore health, should resort to this newly-discovered universal medicine was not so strange. Captain Crowle, who, to my certain knowledge, had never suffered a day's sickness in the seventy years of his life; who kept his teeth firm and sound; whose hair had not fallen off; who stood firm on his legs and square in his shoulders; who still drank free and devoured his rations as eagerly as any able-bodied sailor, marched every morning to the Pump Room and took his glass.

'Jack,' he said, 'the discovery is truly miraculous. By the Lord! it will make us all live to be a hundred. Already I feel once more like a man of thirty. I shall shake a leg, yet, at the wedding of Molly's children—ay, and her grandchildren.'

They all consulted the doctor—the sick and the well alike—the former in order to be cured, and the latter in order to guard against disease. Now that one knows the foundation of the whole business it is wonderful to reflect upon the number of cures the doctor was able to register in his book; cures about which there could be neither doubt nor dispute, so that one is fain to think that faith alone may be sufficient to drive out rheumatism. The prescription of the worthy doctor rested entirely on the curative power of the water. 'You will take,' he said to everyone who came to him, 'every morning, before breakfast for choice, a glass of the water. Or, if you prefer first to take a dish of tea, a cup of chocolate, or a draught of beer, do so by all means. In that case take your glass an hour—not more—after breakfast. I prescribe, in your case, a dose in a glass numbered A,' or B, or C, as the case might be. 'It contains seven ounces and six drachms,' or some other weight, as the case might be. He was very exact in the size of the glass and the capacity of the dose. 'This is the exact quantity which operates efficaciously in your case. Do not take more, for it will not expedite your cure; nor less, for that will hinder it. Seven ounces and six drachms.'

The doctor's dignity and gravity, indeed, were a credit to the town. Out of London, I believe, there was no physician with such outward tokens of science. The velvet coat he now wore habitually; a new wig, greatly delayed, had been brought from Norwich; his lace and his linen were clean every morning; his fingers became curly from the continual clasp of the guinea. No one, I am sure, expected to find so grave and dignified a physician in a town occupied mainly by rude tarpaulins and their ladies. Where nothing better than a mere apothecary could be expected there was found a physician,

in manner and in appearance equal to the most fashionable doctor of medicine in London itself.

'Before breakfast, madam,' he repeated; 'fasting, if possible. If that is not convenient, after breakfast. Think not to hasten the operation of the waters by too generous a use of them. Seven ounces and six drachms in dose. Let that be your daily allowance; that and no more. For your diet, let it be ample, generous, and of the best quality that the market supplies. There is here, providentially, considering the wants of the Spa, the best market in Norfolk, provided with birds of all kinds, both wild and of the farmyard; with beef and mutton fattened on the pastures of Marshland; and with fruit and other things of the very best. Partake plentifully, madam. Do not deny yourself. Tea you may take if you desire it; very good tea can be obtained of the apothecary at a guinea a pound. For my own part, I allow the beverage to be sometimes useful in clearing the brain of noxious vapours and the body of corrupt humours. For wine I recommend port, Malmesey, Madeira, or Lisbon—but not more than one measured pint in the day. You must take exercise gently by walking in the gardens, or in the Long Room, or by dancing in the evening, and you may maintain cheerfulness of mind, which is beneficial in any case, whether of sickness or of health, by taking a hand in the Card Room.'

To the gentlemen who had not as yet fallen victims to any of the prevalent diseases he would discourse much after the same fashion.

'Put out your tongue, sir—I believe it to be furred—so. Dear me! Worse than I suspected. And your pulse? I believe it to be strong. So. As I thought. A little too strong, perhaps even febrile. Your habits, I suppose, include a hearty appetite and a full allowance of old ale

and wine. You ride—you hunt—you attend races and the cockpit, and sports of all kinds; you are not addicted to reading or to study. And you sometimes play cards.'

'The doctor,' said his patient, afterwards, 'knew exactly, and could tell by my pulse and my tongue my daily way of living. 'Tis wonderful!'

'It is my duty to warn you, sir, that you have within you the seeds of gout—of inflammatory gout—which will fix itself upon the big toe, and there become like a bag of red-hot needles. Afterwards it will mount higher—but I will spare you the description of your dying agonies. You may, however, avert this suffering, or postpone it, so that it will only seize upon you should you live to a hundred and twenty, or thereabouts. The surest method is by drinking these waters every year for a week or two. One tumbler every morning fasting. You will take a measured weight of seven ounces and six drachms'—or, as I said before, some other dose. 'I prescribe, in your case, no other medicine. Let your diet be generous. Confine yourself to a single bottle of wine a day. Ride as usual, and, in fact, live as you are accustomed. Nature, sir, abhors a revolution; she expects to perform her usual work in the usual manner.'

If any came to him already afflicted with gout or rheumatism, he prescribed for them in a similarly easy and simple fashion.

'You have been taking colchicum,' or whatever it might have been. 'I recommend you on no account to discontinue a medicine to which you are accustomed. Gout is an enemy which may be attacked from many points. While it is resisting, so far successfully, the attack by the drugs which have been administered to you, I shall attack it from an unsuspected quarter. Ha! I shall fall, sir, upon the unguarded flank with an infallible method. You will

take, sir, three glasses of water daily, each before meals. Each glass contains the measured weight of seven ounces and six drachms,' or some other dose which was carefully prescribed. 'You will, in other respects, follow the diet recommended by your former physicians.'

'The doctor,' said his patient, 'is not one who scoffs at his brethren. On the contrary, he continues their treatment, only adding the water. And you see what I am now.'

'Observe,' the doctor continued, 'my treatment is simple. It is so simple that it must command success. I shall expect, therefore, to find in you, for your own share in the cure, that faith which assists Nature. Nothing so disconcerts an enemy as the confidence of victory on the other side. Before that faith gout flies terrified; and Nature, triumphant, resumes that nicely balanced equilibrium of all the functions which the unlearned call health.'

The doctor also encouraged his dippers, one of whom was a young woman of attractive appearance and great freedom of tongue, to relate, for the benefit of those who drank the waters, cases of cure and rapid recovery. This encouragement caused the girl, who had a fine natural gift of embellishment or development, to sing the praises of the Spa with a most audacious contempt for the structure of fact.

'Lawk, madam!' she would say, using the broad Norfolk accent which I choose to convert into English, because her discourse would be unintelligible save to the folk of the county; 'to think what this blessed water can do! That poor gentleman who has just gone out—you saw yourself that he now walks as upright as a lance and as stiff as a recruiting sergeant—he first came to the Pump Room—was it a fortnight ago or three weeks, Jenny? Twelve

days? To be sure. You ought to know—Jenny dipped for him, madam. He was carried in; his very crutches were no good to him; and as for his poor feet, they dangled for all the world like lumps of pork. And his groans—lawk!—they would move a heart of stone. Jenny here, who has a feeling heart, though but a humble dipper at your service, madam, like myself, and pleased to be of service to so fine a lady, burst into tears when she saw him—didn't you, Jenny, my dear? Before all the people, she did. Well, he drank three tumblers every day—each exactly seven ounces and six drachms in weight—oh! the doctor knows what to do for his patients—did your ladyship ever see a wiser doctor? On the third day he left off groaning; on the fourth he said, "I feel better, give me my third tumbler." Didn't he say those very words, Jenny? "Give me my third," he said. On the fifth day he walked in by himself. It was on crutches, it is true, for even this water takes its time. Lord forbid that I should tell your ladyship anything but Gospel! On the sixth day he used a walking-stick; on the seventh, he said, walking upright, his stick over his shoulder, "If it was not Sunday," he said, "I should cut a caper—cut a caper," he said. Jenny heard him. And now he talks of going home, where a sweet young lady, almost as beautiful as your ladyship, waits for him with a fortune of twenty thousand pounds. She couldn't marry a man—could she, madam?—with both feet, as a body might say, in the grave. Nobody except the doctor and us dippers knows the secrets of the Spa. If we could talk—but there! We are bound to secrecy, because ladies would not let the world know that they have had ailments; but if we could talk you would be astonished. Tell her ladyship, Jenny, about the old gammer of ninety while I attend to the company. Yes, sir, coming, sir.'

And so she rattled on, talking all day long and never tired of inventing these stories. The people listened, laughed, affected disbelief, yet believed. They drank the waters and put down their twopences, which went into a box, kept for the doctor. What with the patients' guineas and the daily harvest of this box, he, at least, was in a fair way of proving the truth of his own prophecy, that everybody in Lynn would be enriched by the grand discovery.

CHAPTER IX

SENT TO THE SPA

At the outset, though the Pump Room was full every morning and the Gardens and Long Room in the evening were well attended, the Spa lacked animation. The music pleased, the singers pleased, the coloured lamps dangled in chains between the branches and pleased. Yet the company was dull; there was little noise of conversation, and no mirth or laughter; the family groups were not broken up; the people looked at each other and walked round and round in silence; after the first round or so, when they had seen all the dresses, the girls yawned and wanted to sit down.

The Master of the Ceremonies exerted himself in vain. He had hoped so much and promised so much that it was sad to see him standing in front of the orchestra and vainly endeavouring to find couples for the minuet. How should they dance a minuet when there were no leaders to begin? And where were the gentlemen? Most of them were at the tavern or the cockpit, drinking and cockfighting, and making bets. What was the use of calling a country dance when there were none to stand up except ladies and old men? Mr. Prappet, in a blue silk coat and embroidered waistcoat, hat under arm, and flourishing his legs as a fencing master flourishes his arms, fell into despondency. 'I make no progress, Mr. Pentecrosse,' he said.

'I cannot begin with the beaux of the town; they are nautical or rustical, to tell the truth, and they are beneath the gentry of the county. If I begin with them, none of the gentry will condescend either to dance with them or to follow them, and so the character of the assembly will be gone. We must obey the laws of society. We want rank, sir. We want a leader. We want two or three people of fashion, otherwise these county families, none of whom will yield precedence to any other, and will not endure that one should stand up before the other, will never unbend. They are jealous. Give me a leader—a nobleman—a baronet—a lady of quality—and you shall see how they will fall in. First, the nobility, according to rank; after them, the gentry; then the town. Degrees must be observed. But, in order to observe degrees, sir, we must have rank among us. At present we are a mob. An assembly in the polite world should be like the English Constitution, which, Mr. Pentecrosse, consists of Lords and Commons — Ladies, and the wives and daughters of Commoners.'

To me it was amusing only to see the people in their fine dresses marching round and round while the music played, trailing their skirts on the floor, swinging their hoops, and handling their fans; for the lack of young men, talking to the clergy from the cathedrals and the colleges, and casting at each other glances of envy if one was better dressed, or of scorn when one was worse dressed than themselves.

'As for the men, Jack,' said Captain Crowle, 'I keep looking about me. I try the Pump Room in the morning, the ordinary at dinner, the taverns after dinner. My lad, there is not one among them all who is fit to be mated with our Molly. Gentlemen, are they? I like not the manner of these gentlemen. They are mostly young, but

drink hard already. If their faces are red and swollen at twenty-five, what will they be at forty? My girl shall marry none of them. Nor shall she dance with them. She shall stay at home.'

In fact, during the first week or two after the opening of the Spa Molly remained at home, and was not seen in the Long Room or in the Gardens.

The town was nearly full, many of the visitors having to put up with mean lodgings in the crazy old courts, of which there are so many in Lynn, when the first arrival from London took place. It was that of a clergyman named Benjamin Purdon, Artium Magister, formerly of Trinity College, Cambridge. He was a man of insignificant presence, his figure being small and thin, but finely dressed. His head was almost hidden by a full ecclesiastical wig. Apparently he was between forty and fifty years of age; he looked about him and surveyed the company with an air of superiority, as if he had been a person of rank. He spoke with a loud, rather a high voice; his face was pale, and his hands, which he displayed, were as white as any woman's; on one finger he wore a large ring with a stone on which were carved three graces, or Greek goddesses, standing in a row. To some the ring was a stumbling-block, as hardly in accordance with the profession of a divine. 'Art,' however, he was wont to say, 'knows nothing of Eve's apple and its consequences. Art is outside religion;' and so forth. Fustian stuff, it seems to me, looking back; but at that time we were carried away by the authority of the man.

He came to us down the river by a tilt boat from Cambridge, and accepted, contentedly, quite a humble lodging, barely furnished with a chair and a flock bed. 'Humility becomes a divine,' he said, in a high, authoritative voice. 'The room will serve. A coal fire and an

open window will remove the mustiness. Who am I that I should demand the luxuries of Lucullus? The Cloth should daily offer an example. We must macerate the flesh.' He was thin, but he certainly practised not maceration. 'We must subdue the body. To him who meditates a hovel becomes a palace. There is an ordinary, you say, daily at the Crown—at two shillings? For the better subjugation of the carnal appetite it should have been one and sixpence. Nevertheless, I have heard of the green goslings of Lynn. Perhaps I shall now be privileged to taste them. There were excellent ruffs and reeves when I was at College that came to the Market-place from the Fens in the May time. You have a Portuguese trade, I am told—in wine, I hope, otherwise we are not likely to get anything fit for a gentleman to drink. It is, indeed, little that I take; were it not for my infirmities, I should take none. Your port, I hope, is matured. More sickness is caused by new wine than by any other cause. Give me wine of twenty years—but that is beyond hope in this place. If it is three, four, or five years old, I shall be fortunate beyond my expectation.' He did not say all these fine things at once, or to one person; but by bits to his brother clergyman, the Vicar of St. Margaret's; to Captain Crowle, to the Mayor, to the landlady of the Crown Inn, to the ladies in the Long Room. 'You see me as I am, a poor scholar, a humble minister of the Church—*servus servorum*, to use the style and title of the Pope; one who despises wealth.' Yet his cassock was of thick silk and his bands were laced. 'I live in London because I can there find, when I want it, a lectureship for my preaching, and a library—that of Sion College—for my reading, study, meditation, and writing. I leave behind me, unfinished, my work—my *magnum opus*—forgive the infirmity natural to man of desiring to live in the memory

of men. I confess that I look forward with pleasure to future fame: my "History of the Early Councils" will be a monument—if I may be permitted so to speak of it—a monument of erudition. I come here by order of my physician. Ladies, this sluggish body, which gives us so much trouble, must be kept in health (as well as in subjection) if we would perform the tasks laid down for us. The waters which I am about to drink will, under Providence, drive away those symptoms which have made my friends, rather than myself, anxious. As for me, what cause have I for anxiety? Why should I not be ready to lay down pen and book, and teach no more?'

He was, perhaps—though we must allow a good deal to his profession—too fond of preaching. He practised in the morning at the Pump Room. Holding a glass of water to the light, he discoursed on the marvels of Providence in concealing sovereign remedies under the guise of simple water, such as one may find in any running brook to all appearance, and yet so potent. He would preach in the Gardens. He would show the piety of his character even when taking supper—a cold chicken and a bottle of Lisbon—in an alcove beside the dancing platform. In this way he rapidly acquired a great reputation, and drew after him every day a following of ladies; there are always ladies who desire nothing so much as pious talk on matters of religion with one who has a proper feeling for the sex, and is courteous and complimentary, deferent and assiduous, as well as learned, pious, and eloquent. The good man, for his part, was never tired of conversing with these amiable ladies, especially with the younger sort; but I believe there were jealousies among them, each desiring the whole undivided man for herself, which is not uncommon even among ladies of the strictest profession in religion.

It was presently learned that Mr. Purdon had offered to

take the services at St. Nicholas for a few weeks in order to enable the curate to attend the bedside of a parent. He undertook this duty without asking for any fee or pay, a fact which greatly increased his reputation. He continued the morning services, now held in a well-filled church, and delivered a sermon on Sunday morning. Never before had the good people who sat in the church heard discourses of so much eloquence, such close reasoning, such unexpected illustrations; with passages so tender and so pathetic. The women wept; the men cleared their throats; the sermons of his Reverence drew after him the whole company, except those who spent their Sunday morning at the tavern, and also excepting the clergymen of the Cathedrals and the Colleges. These, for some reason, looked upon him with distrust.

Among those who thus regarded him was the Vicar of St. Margaret's, the Rev. Mark Gentle. He was, to begin with, the very opposite of the other in all respects. He lived simply, drinking no wine; he was a silent man, whose occasional words were received with consideration; he was a great scholar, with a fine library. His discourses were not understood by the congregation, but they were said to be full of learning. He did not make himself agreeable to the ladies; he never talked of religion; he never spoke of his own habits or his own learning. He was a tall spare man with a thin face and a long nose, of the kind which is said to accompany a sense of humour; and he had sometimes a curious light in his eye like the flash of a light in the dark.

'The Reverend Benjamin Purdon,' he said, with such a flash, 'interests me greatly. He is a most learned person —indeed, he says so himself. I quoted a well-known passage of a Greek tragedy to him yesterday, and he said that his Hebrew he left behind him when he came into the

country. We must not think that this proves anything. A man's ear may be deceived. I offered him the use of my library, but he declined. That proves nothing, either, because he may not wish to read at present. I hear that the women weep when he preaches; and that proves nothing. Sir, I should like the opinion of Sion College, which is a collection of all the rectors and vicars of the City churches, as to the learning of this ecclesiastic. He is, doubtless, all that he proclaims himself. But, after all, that means nothing. We shall probably learn more about him. Whatever we learn will, we may confidently expect, redound to his credit, and increase his reputation.'

This he said in my presence, to my father. 'I know not,' he replied, 'how much this learned theologian professes, but humility is not one of his virtues. I offered, meeting him in the Herb Market yesterday, to show him the school as a venerable monument erected for the sake of learning three hundred years ago. "Pedagogue!" he answered. "Know thy place!" So he swept on his way, swelling under his silken cassock.'

Captain Crowle, however, with many others, was greatly taken with him. 'Jack,' he said, 'the London clergyman shames our rusticity. Learning flows from him with every word he speaks. He makes the women cry. He is full of pious sentiment. If we have many visitors so edifying, this discovery is like to prove for all of us the road to Heaven as well as the means of wealth.'

Alas! the road to Heaven seldom, so far as I understand, brings the pilgrim within reach of the means of wealth. But this the Captain could not understand, because he had been amassing wealth for his ward, not for himself, and therefore knew not the dangers of the pursuit.

The Reverend Benjamin Purdon was only a forerunner. He was followed by the rest of the company—the de-

lectable company—brought together for our destruction. I would not willingly anticipate the sequel of these arrivals among us, but there are moments when I am fain to declare a righteous wrath. As for revenge—but it would be idle to speak of revenge. When a man has taken all that he can devise or procure in the way of revenge—bodily pain, ruin, loss of position, exposure, everything—the first injury remains untouched. This cannot be undone; nor can the injury be atoned by any suffering or any punishment. Revenge, again, grows more hungry by what should satisfy it; revenge is never satisfied. Revenge has been forbidden to man because he cannot be trusted. It is the Lord's. In this case it was the Lord who avenged our cause, and, I believe, turned the injury into a blessing, and made our very loss a ladder that led to Heaven.

A day or two after Mr. Purdon's arrival came a carriage and four containing a very fine lady indeed, with her maid and her man. She drove to the Crown, the people all looking after her. A large coat of arms was emblazoned on the door of her carriage, with a coronet and supporters; her man was dressed in a noble livery of pale green with scarlet epaulettes. A little crowd gathered round the door of the Crown while the footman held the door open and the lady spoke with the landlord.

'Sir,' she said, inclining her head graciously and smiling upon the crowd, 'I have been directed to ask for thy good offices in procuring a lodging. I am a simple person, but a body must have cleanliness and room to turn about.'

'Madam,' said the landlord, 'there is but one lodging in the town which is worthy of your ladyship. I have, myself, across the Market Place, a house which contains three or four rooms. These I would submit to your ladyship's consideration.'

This was an excellent beginning. The lady took the

rooms at the rent proposed and without haggling; there were two bedrooms, for herself and her maid, and one room in which she could sit; the man found lodgings elsewhere. It appeared from his statement that his mistress was none other than the Lady Anastasia, widow of the late Lord Langston, and sister of the living Earl of Selsey. It was therefore quite true, as Sam Semple had announced, that persons of quality were coming to the Spa.

The Lady Anastasia at this time was about twenty-six years of age, or perhaps thirty, a handsome woman still, though no longer in the first flush of her beauty. Her dress, as well as her manner, proclaimed the woman of fashion. I confess that, as a simple sailor, one who could not pretend to be a gentleman and had never before seen a woman of rank, much less conversed with one, I was quite ready, after she had honoured me with a few words of condescension and kindness, to become her slave. She could bear herself with the greatest dignity, and even severity, as certain ladies discovered who presumed upon her kindness and assumed familiarity. But while she could freeze with a frown and humiliate with a look, she could, and did, the next moment subdue the most obdurate and disarm the most resentful with her gracious smile and with her voice, which was the softest, the most musical and the most moving that you can imagine. She had been a widow for two or three years, and, having now put off the weeds, she was rejoicing at the freedom which the world allows to a young widow of fortune and of rank.

You may be sure that the news of her arrival was speedily spread through the town. On the first night Lady Anastasia remained in her lodgings; but the ringers of St. Margaret's gave her a welcome with the bells, and in the morning the horns saluted her with a tune and a flourish under her windows. To the ringers she sent her

thanks, with money for supper and plenty of beer, and to the horns she sent out a suitable present of money, also with thanks.

Later on, a deputation, consisting of the Mayor in his robes and his gold chain, accompanied by the Aldermen in their gowns, the Vicar in his cassock and gown, the doctor in his best velvet coat and his biggest wig, and Captain Crowle in his Sunday suit of black cloth, waited on the Lady Anastasia. They marched along the street from the Town Hall, preceded by the beadle in his green coat with brass buttons and lace hat, carrying the borough mace, all to do honour to this distinguished visitor.

They were received by the lady reclining on the sofa. Beside her stood her maid in a white apron and a white cap. At the door stood her man in his green livery—very fine. As for the Lady Anastasia's dress, I will attempt on another occasion a more particular description. Suffice it to say that it was rich and splendid. The reception which she accorded to the deputation was most gracious and condescending, in this respect surpassing anything that they had expected. They looked, indeed, for the austerity and dignity of rank, and were received by the affability which renders rank wherein it is found admired and respected. Indeed, whatever I shall have to relate concerning this lady, it must be acknowledged that she possessed the art of attracting all kinds of people, of compelling their submission to her slightest wishes and of commanding their respectful affection. So much I must concede.

The Mayor bade her welcome to the Spa. 'Madam,' he said, 'this town until yesterday was but a seaport, and we ourselves for the most part merchants and sailors. We are not people of fashion; we do not call ourselves courtiers; but you will find us honest. And we hope

that you will believe in our honesty when we venture, with all respect, to declare ourselves greatly honoured by this visit of your ladyship.'

'Indeed, Worshipful Sir, and Reverend Sir—and you, gentlemen, I am grateful for your kind words. I am here only in the pursuit of health. I want nothing more, believe me, but to drink your sovereign waters—of which my physician speaks most highly—and when my health allows me, to attend your church.'

'We hope to offer your ladyship more than the Pump Room,' the Mayor continued. 'We have devised, in our humble way, rooms for the entertainment of the company with music and gardens, and we hope to have an Assembly for dancing in the Long Room. They are not such entertainments as your ladyship is accustomed to adorn, but such as they are, we shall be deeply honoured if you will condescend to join them. You will find the gentry, and their ladies, of the county and others not unworthy of your ladyship's acquaintance.'

'Sir, I accept your invitation with great pleasure. These gaieties are, indeed, unexpected. I look forward, gentlemen, to making the acquaintance, before many days, of your ladies as well.'

So saying she rose and dropped a curtsey, while her man threw open the door and the deputation withdrew.

The doctor remained behind.

'Madam,' he said, 'you have been ordered—advised—by your physician to try the waters of our Spa. Permit me, as the only physician of the town, an unworthy member of that learned College, to take charge of your health during your stay. Your ladyship will allow me to feel your pulse. Humph! It beats strong—a bounding pulse—as we of the profession say. A bounding pulse. To be sure, your ladyship is in the heyday of life, with youth

and strength. A bounding pulse. Some of my brethren might be alarmed at febrile indications; they would bleed you—even *ad plenum rivum*—forgive the Latin. For my own part, I laugh at these precautions. I find in the strength of the pulse nothing but the ardour of youth. I see no necessity for reduction of strength by blood-letting. Your ladyship will perhaps detail the symptoms for which this visit to the Spa was ordered.'

The lady obeyed.

'These symptoms,' said the doctor, 'are grave. As yet they are menacing only. Nature has given warning. Nature opens her book so that we who know her language may read. We meet her warnings by sharp action. Your ladyship will, therefore, while continuing the course recommended by my learned brother, take one glass of the water daily; in the morning, before breakfast, fasting. Each dose must contain seven ounces and six drachms. I shall have the honour to visit your ladyship daily, and we will regulate the treatment according to the operation of the water.'

'And must I give up the innocent pleasures offered me by your friends, doctor? Surely, you will not be so cruel.'

'By no means, madam. Partake of all—of all—in moderation. Cards are good, if you like them. Dancing, if you like it—with your symptoms you must, above all things, nourish the body and keep the mind in cheerfulness.'

The doctor withdrew and proceeded to relate to the Pump Room some particulars, with embellishments, of his interview with the Lady Anastasia.

'Nothing,' he said, 'can be imagined more gracious than her manner. It is at once dignified and modest. "I trust myself entirely in your hands," she said. What an example to patients of lower rank! "I rely entirely

on your skill and knowledge," she added. It should be a lesson for all. I confess that it is gratifying, even though the compliment was not undeserved and the confidence is not misplaced. We may look for her ladyship in the Long Room this evening. I hope to present to her many of the ladies of the company. It is a great thing for the visitors and patients of the Spa, that this accession of rank and fashion has arrived. Her beauty will prove more attractive to the gentlemen than the cockpit and the tavern; her manners and her dress will be the admiration of the ladies. She will lead in the dance, she will be Queen of the Spa. The widow of the Right Honourable the Lord Langston, the daughter and the sister of the Right Honourable the Earl of Selsey'—he rolled out the titles as if he could not have too much of them or too many—'has come among us. We will restore her to health by means of our Spa; she will instruct our young folk in the manners of the polite world.'

In the evening the lady came to the Long Room soon after the music commenced. Mr. Prappet, bowing low, invited her to honour the evening by dancing a minuet. He presented a gentleman, the son of a Norfolk squire, who, with many blushes, being still young, led out this lady, all jewels, silk, ribbons, and patches, and with such grace as he could command, performed the stately dance of the fashionable Assembly.

This done, the Master of the Ceremonies presented another gentleman, and her ladyship condescended to a second dance—after which she retired and sat down. The first gentleman then danced with another lady; the second gentleman succeeded him, and dance followed dance. Mr. Prappet presented to Lady Anastasia those of the ladies who belonged to the gentry, and she was presently surrounded by a court or company, with whom she

HE PRESENTED A GENTLEMAN.

discoursed pleasantly and graciously. The Spa had found a leader; the assembly was no longer frigid and constrained; everybody talked and everybody laughed; the family groups were broken up; none of the younger gentlemen deserted the Assembly for the cockpit; and when the country dance began and Lady Anastasia led, dancing down the middle, taking hands and freely mixing with ladies who had no pretensions to family, being perhaps the daughters of merchants, and those in Lynn itself, the barriers were broken down, and, without setting themselves apart on account of family pride, the whole company gave itself up to pleasure. When the music ceased, there was a run upon the supper-tables, and you could hear nothing but the drawing of corks, the clicking of knives and forks, the music of pleasant talk, and the laughter of girls. When, at midnight, the Lady Anastasia called for her chair, a dozen young gentlemen sprang up to escort her home, walking beside the chair to her lodgings, and bowing low as she ran up the steps of her house.

The next arrival from London was a person of less consequence. He was quite an old gentleman, who was brought, it appeared, by easy stages in a postchaise. The roughness of the road, especially towards the end, had shaken him to such an extent that he was unable even to get out of the chaise, and was carried into the house, where they found him a lodging and put him to bed. His man told the people that this was Sir Harry Malyns, a baronet and country gentleman, whose life was wholly devoted to the pleasures of town. Those who had seen the withered old anatomy carried out of his carriage laughed at the thought of this ancient person still devoted to the pleasures of the town. 'Nay,' said the valet, grinning, 'but wait till you see him dressed. Wait till

he has passed through my hands. You think he is at his last gasp. Indeed, I thought so myself when I gave him his sack posset and put him to bed, but he will recover. Sir Harry is not so old but he can still bear some fatigues.' And, indeed, you may imagine the surprise of those who had seen him the day before, when, about eleven o'clock in the forenoon, Sir Harry came out of the house and walked along the street. In place of a decrepit old man they saw the most gallant and the most bravely dressed Beau that you can imagine. He appeared from the back and from either side—where his face was not visible—a young gentleman in the height of fashion. To be sure, there was a certain unsteadiness of gait, and if his foot struck against an uneven piece of pavement you might perceive his knees knocking together and his legs beginning to tremble. But he rallied bravely, and went on. He carried his hat under his arm, a coloured cane dangled from his right wrist, his left hand carried a gold snuff-box with a lady painted on the outside. He walked with an affected step, such as we call mincing, and when he came to the Pump Room he entered it upon his toes, with his knees bent and his arms extended. For an example of the manners which mean nothing but affectation and pretence, there was no one at the Spa who could compare with old Sir Harry.

The Pump Room was tolerably full of people who came in the forenoon to talk. Sir Harry, pretending not to observe the curiosity with which he was regarded, introduced himself to a gentleman by means of his snuff-box. 'Sir,' he said, 'have we any company at the Spa?' He looked round the room as if disdainfully. 'Fine women, of course, we have. Norfolk is famous for fine women and fat turkeys; but as for company?'

'Sir, we have many of the county gentry of Norfolk

and Lincolnshire; we have Divines from the cathedral cities, and scholars from Cambridge.'

'But of company—such as a gentleman may call company?'

'Why, sir,' said the other, himself a plain gentleman of Norfolk, 'if you are not satisfied with what you see, you had better find some other place for your exalted society.'

'Pray, sir, forgive me. I am but recently arrived from London. No doubt the assembly is entirely composed of good families. I am myself but a country gentleman and a simple baronet. I used the word "company" in a sense confined to Town.'

'Well, sir, since you are no better than the rest of us, I may tell you that we have among us a certain lady of rank —the Lady Anastasia Langston——'

'Pray, sir, pray—excuse me. Not a "certain" Lady Anastasia. If you have the Lady Anastasia, you have, let me tell you, the very pearl of highest fashion. If she is here, you are indeed fortunate. One woman of her beauty, grace, wealth, rank, and goodness is enough to make the fortune of the Spa. Bath worships her; Tunbridge prays for her return; there will be lamentation when it is known that she has deserted these places for the newly discovered waters of Lynn.'

'Indeed, sir, we ought to feel greatly honoured.'

'You ought, sir. Your ladies of Norfolk will learn more from her, as concerns the great world and the world of fashion, in a week than they could learn at the Assembly of Norwich in a year. The Lady Anastasia carries about with her the air which stamps the woman of the highest fashion. She walks like a goddess, she talks like an angel, and she smiles like a nymph—if there are such nymphs, woodland or ocean nymphs—who wear hoops, put on patches, build up head-dresses, and brandish fans.'

There was another whose arrival from London caused no ringing of bells and salutations by the horns. This was a certain Colonel Lanyon, who wore the King's scarlet, having served and received promotion in the King's armies. He was about forty years of age; a big, blustering fellow who rolled his shoulders as he walked along and took the wall of everybody. He began, as he continued, by spending his time in the Card Room, at the cockpit, at the badger-drawing, bull-baiting, horse-racing, cudgel-playing —wherever sport was going on or betting to be made. He drank the hardest, he played the deepest, he swore the loudest, he was always ready to take offence. Yet he was tolerated, and even liked, because he was good company. He sang songs, he told anecdotes, he had seen service in the West Indies and in many other places, he had passed through many adventures; he assumed, and successfully, the manner of a good sportsman—free with his money, who played deep, paid his debts of honour at once, and expected to be paid in like manner. Now, the gentlemen of Norfolk esteem a good sportsman above all things, and readily pass over any little faults in a man who pleases them in this respect. As for the ladies, the Colonel made no attempt to win their good graces, and was never seen either in the Long Room or the Gardens or the Assembly.

CHAPTER X

'OF THE NICEST HONOUR'

Last of all came the prince of this company, whom I now know was the arch villain, Lord Fylingdale himself.

We were prepared for his arrival by a letter from Sam Semple. He wrote to the doctor informing him that my lord was about to undertake his journey to Lynn, that he hoped to complete it in three days, and that he would probably arrive on such a day. He further stated that the best rooms at the Crown Inn were to be engaged, and that he, himself, namely, Sam, would accompany his lordship in the capacity of private secretary and, as he put it, confidential companion. To write such a letter to the doctor was to proclaim it as from the house-top. In fact, the good doctor made haste to read it aloud in the Pump Room and to communicate the news to the Mayor and Aldermen.

Sir Harry, being asked if he knew his lordship, shook his head. 'We of the gay world,' he said, speaking as a young man, 'do not commonly include Lord Fylingdale among the beaux and bucks. There is in him a certain haughtiness which forbids the familiarities common among ourselves.'

'Is he, then, a saint?'

'Why, sir, I know nothing about saints. There are

none, I believe, among my friends. I have, however, seen Lord Fylingdale on the racecourse at Newmarket, and I have seen him at the tables when the game of hazard was played. And I have never yet seen saint or angel at either place.'

'Then, how is Lord Fylingdale distinguished?'

'Partly by his rank, but that is not everything. Partly by his wealth, but that is not everything. Partly by his superiority, which is undoubted. For he has none of the foibles of other men; if he sits down to a bottle he does not call for t'other; if he plays cards he wins or he loses with equal composure, caring little which it may turn out; his name has never been mentioned with that of any woman. Yet the world is eager after scandal, and would rejoice to whisper something concerning him.'

'He will condescend to despise us, then,' said the Vicar of St. Margaret's, 'seeing that our world is wholly addicted to sport, and takes fortune with heat and passion.'

'Not so, reverend sir. He will, perhaps, attend our entertainments, but his mind is set above such vanities. As for me, sir, I own that I live for them. But my Lord Fylingdale lives for other things.'

'He is ambitious, perhaps. Has he thoughts of place and of the Ministry?'

Sir Harry took snuff. 'Pardon me, sir. The world talks. I love the world, but I do not always talk with the world. It may be that there are reasons of State which bring him to this neighbourhood. I say nothing.' But he pointed over his shoulder and nodded his head with meaning.

It will be remembered that Houghton, the seat of Sir Robert Walpole, then the Minister all-powerful, is but a few miles from Lynn. The crowd heard and whispered, and the rumour ran that under pretence of seeking health

Lord Fylingdale was coming to Lynn in order . . . here the voice dropped, and the rest fell into the nearest ear.

The Rev. Mr. Purdon was more eloquent. 'What?' he cried, 'Lord Fylingdale coming here? Lord Fylingdale? Why, what can his lordship want at Lynn?'

'We have heard that he is sent here to drink the waters.'

Mr. Purdon shook his head wisely. 'It may be. I do not say that. . . . There is perhaps gout in the family. . . . But with a personage—a personage, I say, there are many reasons which prompt to action. However——'

'Pray, sir, if you know him, inform us further as to his lordship.'

'Madam, I was his tutor. I accompanied him on the Grand Tour. I therefore knew him intimately when he was a young man of eighteen. I have been privileged with his condescension since that time. He is at once a scholar, a critic, and a connoisseur; he hath a pretty taste in verse, and can discourse of medals and of cameos. He is also a man of fashion who can adorn an Assembly just as he adorns, when it pleases him, the House of Lords. Yet not a Fribble like certain persons'—he looked at Sir Harry—'nor a Beau, nor a profligate Mohock. Pride he has, I allow. What do you expect of a man with such birth and such ancestry? His pride becomes him. Lesser men can be familiar. He is said to be cold towards the fair sex—I can contradict that calumny. Not coldness but fastidiousness is his fault. "My lord," I have said to him often, "to expect the genius of Sappho, the beauty of Helen, and the charms of Cleopatra, is to ask too much. Not once in an age is such a woman created. Be content, therefore," I ventured to add. "Genius will smile upon you; loveliness will languish for you; dignity will willingly humble herself at your feet." But I have spoken in vain.

He is fastidious. Ladies, if I were young; if I were a noble lord; if I were rich; it is to Norfolk, believe me, that I should fly, contented with the conquests awaiting me here. This is truly a land of freedom, where to be in chains and slavery is the happy lot.'

This was the kind of talk with which we were prepared to await the coming of this Paladin.

He arrived. Late in the day, about seven o'clock, there came into the town, side by side, his lordship's running footmen. They were known by the white holland waistcoat and drawers belonging to their calling, the white thread stockings, white caps, and blue scarves fringed with velvet. In their hands they carried a porter's staff tipped with a silver ball, in which I suppose was carried a lemon. The rogues trotted in, without haste, for the roads were bad behind them, and placed themselves at the door of the Crown Inn, one on each side. The landlord stood in the open door, his wife behind him; and speedily half the town gathered together to witness the arrival of the great man.

His carriage came lumbering heavily along the narrow streets. Within, beside his lordship, sat, as grand as you please, our poet Sam Semple. It was admirable to remark the air with which he sprang out of the carriage, offered his arm for the descent of his patron, followed him into the inn, demanded the best rooms, ordered a noble supper, and looked about him with the manner of a stranger and a gentleman, as if the host of the Crown had never boxed his ears for an idle good-for-nothing who could not even make out a bill aright. The bells were set ringing for Lord Fylingdale as they had been for the Lady Anastasia; in the morning the horns saluted the illustrious visitor; and about eleven o'clock, when his lordship was dressed, the Mayor and Aldermen, preceded by the bearer of the

mace and accompanied by the clergy of the town and the doctor, offered a visit of welcome and congratulation.

They retired overwhelmed by the condescension of their guest. 'One does not expect,' said the doctor, 'the gracious sweetness of a lady; but we received every possible mark of politeness and of consideration. As for the Mayor, his Lordship treated him as if he were the Lord Mayor of London itself. And for my own part, when I remained on the departure of the rest, I can only say that I was overwhelmed with the confidence bestowed upon me. There has been talk in this Pump Room,' he looked around him, 'of other reasons—reasons of State—and of pretended sickness. The company may take it from me—from ME, I say—that, whatever may be the reasons of State—it is not for us to offer any opinion as to those reasons—the symptoms which have been imparted to me in confidence are such that a visit to the Spa is imperative; and treatment, with drinking of the waters, is absolutely necessary.'

'This Lord Fylingdale, Jack,' said Captain Crowle, who was one of the deputation, 'is a mighty fine gentleman, well favoured and well mannered. I have not yet learned more about him. They say at the Pump Room many things. He received us with condescension, and was good enough to promise attendance at our Assembly, though, he said, these occasions do not afford him so much pleasure as other pursuits. 'Tis a fine thing, Jack, to be a nobleman and to have so much dignity; since I have spoken with the Lady Anastasia I find myself trying to look condescending. But the quarterdeck is one place and the House of Lords is another. The captain of a ship, Jack, if he were affable, would very quickly get knocked o' the head by his crew.'

Meantime Sam Semple showed good sense in going round to visit his old friends. Among others he called

upon Captain Crowle, to whom he behaved, with singular discernment, in such a way as would please the old man. For on board ship we like a cheerful sailor, one who takes punishment without snivelling, and bears no malice thereafter. A ship is like a boys' school, where a flogging wipes out the offence, and master and boy become good friends after it, whatever the heinousness of the crime.

'Sir,' said Sam, standing before the Captain modestly, 'you will understand, first of all, that I am reminded, in coming here, of the last time that I saw you.'

'Ay, my lad, I have not forgotten.' The Captain did not rise from his arm-chair, nor did he offer Sam his hand. He waited to learn in what spirit the young man approached him.

'Believe me, sir,' said Sam, 'I am not unmindful of a certain lesson, rough, perhaps, but deserved. The presumption of youth, ignorance of the world, ignorance of the prize to which I aspired, may be my excuse—if any were needed. I was then both young and ignorant.' It must be admitted that Sam possessed the gift of words. 'Indeed, I was too young to understand the humble nature of my origin and my position, and too ignorant to understand my own presumption. Therefore, sir, before I say anything more, I beg your forgiveness. That presumption, sir, can never, I assure you, be repeated. I know, at least, my own place, and the distance between a certain young lady and myself.'

'Why, my lad,' said the Captain, 'since you talk in that modest way, I bear no malice—none. Wherefore, here is my hand in token of forgiveness. And so on that head we will speak no more.'

He extended his hand, which Sam took, still in humble attitude.

'I am deeply grateful, Captain,' he said. 'You will,

perhaps, before long find out how grateful I can be.' Time, in fact, did show the depth of his gratitude. 'Well, sir, I am now in high favour with my Lord Fylingdale, on whom you waited this morning.'

'I hope his favour will end in a snug place, Sam. Forget not the main point. Well, your patron is a goodly and a proper man to look at. Sit down, Sam. Take a glass of home-brewed—you must want it after the ale of London, which is, so far as I remember, but poor stuff. Well, now, about your noble lord. He is a married man, I suppose?'

'Unfortunately, no. He is difficult to please.'

'Ah! and, I suppose, like most young noblemen, something of a profligate—eh, Sam? Or a gambler, likely! One who has ruined many innocents. Eh?' The Captain looked mighty cunning.

'Sir, sir!' Sam spread out his hands in expostulation. 'You distress me. Lord Fylingdale a profligate? Lord Fylingdale a gambler? Lord Fylingdale a libertine? Sir! —Captain Crowle!' He spoke very earnestly; the tears came into his eyes; he laid his hand upon the Captain's knees. 'Sir, I assure you, he is, on the contrary, the best of men. There is no more virtuous nobleman in the country. My tongue is tied as his lordship's secretary, else would I tell of good deeds. Truly his right hand knoweth not what his left hand doeth. My lord is all goodness.'

'Ay, ay? This is good hearing indeed.'

'Lord Fylingdale a gambler? Why, he may take part at a table; but a gambler? No man is less a gambler. What doth it matter to him if he wins or loses a little? He neither desires to win, nor does he fear to lose. You will, I dare say, see him in the Card Room, just to encourage the spirit of the company.'

'A very noble gentleman indeed.' The Captain drank

a glass of his home-brewed, 'a very noble gentleman truly. Go on, Samuel.'

'Also, Captain, if there is one thing in the world that my patron abhors, it is the man who ruins innocency and leaves his victim to starve. No, sir; his lordship is a man of the nicest honour and the highest principle.'

'He has a secretary who is grateful, at least,' observed the Captain.

'His sword is ever ready to defend the helpless and to uphold the virtuous. Would to Heaven there were more like the Right Honourable the Earl of Fylingdale!'

'Look ye, Master Sam,' said the Captain. 'Your good opinion of your patron does you credit. I honour you for your generous words. I have never so far, and I am now past seventy, encountered any man who was either saint or angel, but in every man have I always found some flaw, whether of temper or of conduct. So that I do not pretend to believe all that you make out.'

Sam Semple sighed and rose. 'I ask not for your entire belief, sir. It will be sufficient if you learn, as I have learned, the great worth of this exalted and incomparable nobleman. As for flaws, we are all human; but I know of none. So I take my leave. I venture to hope, sir, that your good lady and your lovely ward—I use the word with due respect—are in good health.'

So he departed, leaving the Captain thoughtful.

And now they were all among us, the vile crew brought together for our undoing by this lord so noble and so exalted. And we were already entangled in a whole mesh of lies and conspiracies, the result of which you have now to learn.

CHAPTER XI

THE HUMOURS OF THE SPA

And now began that famous month—it lasted very little more—when the once godly town of Lynn was delivered over to the devil and all his crew. We who are natives of the place speak of that time and the misfortunes which followed with reluctance; we would fain forget that it ever fell upon us. To begin with, the place was full of people. They came from all the country round; not only did the gentlefolk crowd into the town and the clergy from the cathedral towns and the Colleges, but there were also their servants, hulking footmen, pert ladies' maids, with the people who flock after them, things more women than men; the hair-dressers, barbers, milliners, dressmakers, and the creatures who deal in things which a fashionable woman cannot do without, those who provide the powder, patches, cosmetics, eau de Chypre, and washes for the complexion, the teeth, the hand, and the face; the jewellers and those who deal in gold and silver ornaments; the sellers of lace, ribbons, gloves, fans, and embroidery of all kinds. Our shops, humble enough to look upon from the outside, became treasure-houses when one entered; and I verily believe that the ladies of the Spa took greater pleasure in turning over the things hidden away behind the shop windows, and not exposed to the vulgar gaze, than in any of the entertainments offered them.

Every other house in Mercer Street and Chequer Row was converted into a shop for the sale of finery; at the door of each stood the shopman or the shopwoman, all civility and assurance, inviting an entrance. 'Madam,' said one, 'I have this day received by the London waggon a consignment of silks which it would do you good only to see and to feel. Enter, madam; the mere sight is better for the vapours than all the waters of the Pump Room. Look at these silks before they are all sold. John, the newly arrived silks for their ladyships,' and so on, all along the streets while the ladies walked slowly over the rough paving stones, followed by their footmen with their long sticks and their insolent bearing. Indeed, I know not which more attracted the curiosity of the countrywomen—the fine ladies or the fine footmen. These gallant creatures, the footmen with their worsted epaulettes and their brave liveries, did not venture into the streets by the riverside—Pudding Lane, Common Stath Lane, or the like—the resort of the sailors, where the reception of those who did venture was warmer and less polite than they expected.

For the gentlemen there were the taverns; every house round the Market Place became a tavern, where an ordinary was held at twelve.

And the gentlemen sat drinking all the afternoon. Nay, they began in the morning, making breakfast of a pint of Canary with a pennyworth of bread, a slice of cheese, and after the meal a penny roll of tobacco. These were the gentlemen belonging to the county families. The attractions of the Spa to them were the tavern, the cockpit, the field where they raced their horses, the badger-baiting, and sport of all these kinds that can be obtained in the spring and summer, when there is no shooting of starlings in the reeds of Marshland, and the decoy of ducks, for which this country is famous.

Rooms had to be found for the servants; a profligate and deboshed crew they were, of whose manners it may be said that they were insolent, and of their morals, that they had none. Two or three of them, however, getting a drubbing from our sailors, the rest went in some terror.

It was as if the birds of the air had carried the news of this great discovery north and south, east and west, so that not only was a great multitude attracted to the place in search of health and pleasure, but also another multitude of those who came to supply every kind of want, real or imaginary. A thousand wants were invented, especially for the ladies, so that whereas many of the damsels from quiet country houses had been content with homespun, linsey woolsey, or, at best, with sarcenet, a few ribbons for their straw hats, and thread for their gloves, they now found themselves unable to appear abroad except with heads made up on wires and round rolls, their hair powdered and pinned to large puff caps, with gowns of silk, flounced sleeves, and a lace tippet. And when they went home they were no longer contented with the things of their own making, the cordials of ginger, cherries, and so forth, the distilled waters, the home-brewed ale, the small beer, the wines made with raspberries, currants, and blackberries. They murmured after tea and coffee, the wine of Lisbon and Canary, the rosolio and the ratafia, the macaroons, the chocolate, the perfumes, and the many gauds of the dressing-table. And they scorned the honest red and brown of cheek and hands that cared nothing for the sun, as if they would be more beautiful in the eyes of their lovers by having cheeks of a dead white with a smudge of paint, and hands as pale as if just out of bed after a long illness.

The way of the company was as follows:—

They met at the Pump Room about ten; they called

for the water; they exchanged the latest scandal; they talked about dress; they bemoaned their losses at cards; they then walked off to morning prayers, chiefly at St. Nicholas's, where, as you have heard, Mr. Benjamin Purdon read them with honeyed words and rolling voice. From the church they repaired to a confectioner's called Jonathan's—I know not why—where they all devoured a certain cake made expressly for them; from the confectioner's some went to the draper, the milliner, or the haberdasher; some to the Long Room, where there were generally public breakfasts of tea, chocolate, and coffee; a few, but these were mostly men, went to the bookseller's, where, for a half a crown a month, they could read all day long and what they pleased. The bookseller came from Norwich, and when the season ended went back to Norwich. Dinner was served at twelve or one. At five o'clock or thereabouts the company began to arrive at the Gardens and the Long Room, where, with music, cards, conversation, and walking among the coloured lamps, the evening was quickly spent. Twice a week there was an Assembly for dancing, when refreshments were provided at the cost of the gentlemen.

For the gentlemen there were also the coffee-houses, of which two at least sprang into existence. One laid down twopence on entering, and could call for a dish of tea, a cup of coffee, or one of chocolate. In one of them were found the clergy, the lawyers, and the justices of the peace; they settled the affairs of the nation and decided the characters of the Ministers. In the other were those who affected to be beaux and wits. Among the latter set one found Sam Semple, now a person of great authority, as the secretary of Lord Fylingdale and the author of a book of verse. He pretended to be an arbiter. 'Sir,' he would say, 'by your leave. The case is quite otherwise.

The matter was lately discussed at Will's. A certain distinguished poet, who shall be nameless, whose opinion carries weight even in that august assemblage, was of opinion that . . .' And so forth with an air of profound wisdom. As regards wit in conversation, it consists, I believe, in finding different ways, all unexpected, of saying: 'You are a fool. You are an ass. You are a jackanapes. You are an ignorant clown. You are a low-born upstart.' This kind of wit was cultivated with some success at first, but as it was not always relished by those to whom it was directed, it led to the pulling of noses and the discharge of coffee or tea in the face of the ingenious author of the unexpected epigram. So that its practice languished, and presently died out altogether.

The most astonishing change, however, was in the Market Place. Here, instead of one market-day in the week, there was a market-day all the week long. The stalls were never removed; every day the country people crowded into the town—some riding, some walking, some in boats, some in barges, bringing poultry, ducks, eggs, butter, cream, milk, cheese, honey, lettuce for sallet, and everything that a farm, a dairy, and a stillroom can provide. Some sat on upturned baskets, their wares spread out before them; some stood at stalls with white hangings to keep off the sun; the fine ladies went about among them chaffering and bargaining, their maids following with baskets. It was a pretty sight, and to my mind the rustic damsels, for good looks, got the better of the fine ladies and their maids. Many of the beaux and young bloods were of the same opinion, apparently, for they, too, went round among the stalls, with compliments not doubtful, and talk more free than polite, chucking the girls under the chin and pinching their cheeks. To be sure, these freedoms do a body no harm, and I believe

our Norfolk girls can look after themselves as well as any.

And every day outside the stalls there assembled such a motley crowd as had never before been seen in Lynn. It was a perpetual fair, at which you could buy anything. Gipsies went about leading horses for sale, the cheap Jack stood on the footboard of his cart and bawled his wares; the rogue stood up, with voice and cheeks of brass, and offered his caps, knives, scissors, cups and saucers, frying-pans, saucepans, kettles, every morning. His store could never be exhausted; he took a quarter of what he asked; and he went on day after day. Nor must we forget the travelling quack, the learned doctor in a huge wig and black velvet; as like to Dr. Worship himself as one pea is like another. He had his stage and his tumbling clown, who twisted himself upon the tight rope, turned somersaults, walked on his head, grinned and made mouths and was as merry a rogue as his master was grave. After the Tom Fool had collected a crowd and made them merry, the doctor advanced, his face full of wisdom, and explained that he came among them newly arrived from Persia, that land famous for its learned physicians; that he was not an ordinary physician, seeking to make money by his science; that, on the other hand, what he offered was given, rather than sold, the charge made being barely sufficient to pay for the costly ingredients used in the making of these sovereign remedies. He had his pills and his draughts; his balsams and his electuary; he had his plaster against rheumatism; his famous *Pulvis Catharticus* against fever; his *Carduus Benedictus* against ague; and, in a word, his infallible remedies against all the ills to which flesh is liable. So he played his part, not every day, but often, for the crowd in the Market Place changed continually, and every change brought him new patients.

Or there was the tooth-drawer. You knew him by the string of teeth which hung round his neck like a string of pearls over the neck of a lady or a collar of SS. round the neck of the worshipful the Mayor. He pulled teeth at half a crown each, and if that was too much, at a shilling. Not only did he bawl his calling among the crowd, but he went through the streets from house to house asking if his services were wanted.

The town crier added to the noise and the animation of the scene. Almost every day he had something to bawl. He was known by his dress and his bell. He wore a green coat with brass buttons; a broad laced hat; he had a broad badge with the arms of the town upon his arm; in one hand he carried a staff, and in the other his big bell. And being by nature endowed with a loud voice and a good opinion of himself, he magnified his office by ringing more loudly and longer than was necessary, by repeating his 'O yes! O yes! O yes!' at the end as well as the beginning of his announcement, and by proclaiming this twice over.

Towards the hour of noon, when every tavern had its ordinary, and the sausages and black puddings were hissing in the cooks' stalls, there arose a fragrance—call it an incense of gratitude—which pleasantly engaged the senses. It was a hogo of frying fish, chops, steaks, sausages, bacon, ham and onions; it included the smell of gosling and duckling and chicken; of rabbit fricassée; of roast pork, lamb, mutton, and beef; of baked pies—all kinds of pies —custards, cheese cakes, dumplings, hasty pudding.

Then the feet of those who could afford it turned to the tavern; those who could not pay the ordinary at two shillings, or that at one shilling, dived into the cellar, where they could dine for sixpence, or stood about the stalls where they fried the sausages; those who brought

their dinner with them sat on their baskets and devoured their food, or bought of the street criers who now went up and down ringing bells and crying:

'Hot black puddings, hot,
Smoking hot,
Just come out of the pot.'

or

'Here, dainty brave cheese cakes,
Come, buy 'em of me;
Two for twopence,
One for a penny;
Come along, customers, if you'll buy any.'

It pleases me to recall the humours of the town at that time. Except for the rows of booths, one would have thought it Stourbridge Fair at Cambridge, which once I saw. The weather was fine and clear, the cold east winds gone. There was so much money flying about that everybody was buying as well as selling; in spite of all that was brought into the town by the visitors, nothing was left when they went away, because all had been spent. We thought that the harvest would last for ever. We looked to a season like that of Bath, which goes on all the year round. If our people took more money in one day than they had before taken in a whole month, they thought that it would go on day after day, and they spent it all without restraint. Nay, the wives and daughters of those who had kept humble shops and been content with fat bacon and hot milk for breakfast, and more bacon for dinner, and who had been clad in homespun, now drank tea with bread and butter for breakfast like the Lady Anastasia herself; dined off ducks and goslings; drank fine ale, and even Canary and Lisbon; and ventured to attend the Assembly, where they stood up to the country dance in silk like any gentlewoman.

I have mentioned the company of players; they acted

three times a week. We who work for our living are apt to despise these mummers and their calling; to pretend every day to be someone else is not, we think, an occupation worthy of a man, while the painting, the disguise, the representation, either in dumb show or in words, of all the passions in turn, must surely leave the actor no real passions of his own. Yet I heard, while this company was with us, cases of such generosity and Christian charity one towards the other when the money ceased to come in, that I am constrained to allow them at least the great Christian virtue of love for one another.

Besides the players, there were the singers and the musicians of the Spa; and there were jugglers, mountebanks, tumblers, tight-rope dancers, ballad-singers, fortune-tellers, conjurers, pedlars and hawkers of all kinds. The town of Lynn, formerly so quiet and retired, with no other disturbance than that caused by a brawl among drunken sailors, became suddenly transformed into the abode of all the devils disengaged at the moment. There were sharpers busy at the races and the cocking; men who laid bets, and if they lost, ran away, but loudly demanded their money when they won; there was gambling; there was drinking; there was fighting; the servants were as corrupt as their masters; there were fresh scandals continually; a reputation lost every day; there were duels fought over drunken quarrels, about women, about bets and wagers; the clerks of the counting-houses were filled with the new spirit of gambling; there were lotteries and raffles in which everybody took tickets, even if they got the money for them dishonestly. In a word, the pursuit of pleasure proved a mad race, down a broad and flowery path, on each side of which were drinking-booths, and music, and dancing, while at the end there opened wide . . . . You shall speedily learn what this was.

CHAPTER XII

THE CAPTAIN'S AMBITION

'JACK,' said the Captain, 'I am now resolved that Molly shall make her appearance at the Assembly, and that as the heiress that she is. Not lowly and humbly. She shall take her place at once among the fine ladies.'

'But she is not a gentlewoman, Captain,' I objected.

'She shall be finer than any gentlewoman of the whole company—just as she is better to look at without any finery.'

'Will the company,' I asked, 'welcome her among them?'

'The women, Jack, will flout and slight her—I have watched them. They flout and slight each other. That breaks no bones. She shall go.'

He went on to explain his designs. As you have heard, they were ambitious.

'I have this day acquainted Molly, for the first time, with the truth. She now knows that she is richer than anyone believed. As for herself, she never thought about her fortune, knowing, she says, that it was safe in my hands. I have opened her father's strong place—it is in the cellar, behind a stone—and I have taken out the treasures that even her mother never saw, because her father wished to lead a homely life, and concealed his treasures. There are jewels and gold chains, bracelets, necklaces, rings—all

kinds of things. Molly has them all—she is even now hugging them in her lap and trying them on before her looking-glass. She shall go to the Assembly covered with jewels.'

'Is there anyone among the whole company fit for her?' I asked.

'There is one, Jack. He is the noble Lord—the Lord Fylingdale—a very great man indeed.'

'Lord Fylingdale? Captain, are you serious?'

'Why, Jack, who can be too high and too grand for my Molly? He is said to be of a virtuous character and pious disposition; he neither gambles nor drinks, nor is a libertine, as is too common among many of his rank.'

'But, Captain, he will marry one of his own rank.'

'Ta-ta! he will marry a fine girl, virtuously brought up, made finer by her fortune. What more can he expect than beauty, modesty, virtue, and a great—a noble fortune? If the girl pleases him—why, Jack, come to think of it, the girl must please him—she would move the heart of an iceberg—then, I say, I shall see my girl raised to her proper place, and I shall die happy.'

'But, Captain, you will raise her above her mother and above yourself, and above all her old friends. You will lose her altogether.'

'Ay, there's the rub. But I shall be contented even with that loss, if she is happy.'

I can see even now the honest eyes of the good old man humid for a moment as he contemplated his own loss, and I can hear his voice shake a little at thinking of the happiness he designed for his ward.

No one would believe that the Captain could be so cunning. No one who reads this history would believe, either, that a man could be so ignorant and so simple. We were all as ignorant and as simple. We all believed

what these lying people—these creatures of the Devil—(when I say the Devil I mean Lord Fylingdale)—told us. Sir Harry said that he was too virtuous and too serious for the world of fashion; the parson said that he was the most cleanly liver of all young men; the poet swore that he was all day long doing and scheming acts of charity and goodness towards the unfortunate. They were all in a tale—these villains—and we were simple and ignorant folk, credulous sailors and honest citizens living remote from the vices of town, who knew nothing and suspected nothing. As for myself, I was carried away, as much as the old Captain, with the thought of the honour and glory that awaited our Molly. I concluded, in my simplicity, that the mere appearance and sight of the lovely girl would make all the men fall madly in love with her, without considering the hundred thousand additional charms held in trust for her by her guardian.

After this talk with the Captain I sought Molly. She was in the summer-house up the garden with her treasures spread out before her. It was a most wonderful sight—but it filled me with madness. I never imagined such a pile of gold and of precious stones. There were diamonds, and rubies, and blue sapphires; there were all kinds of gems, with chains of gold and bracelets—a glittering pile of gold and jewels. Yet my heart sank at the spectacle.

'Look, Jack, look!' she cried. 'They are all mine! All mine!' She gathered up a handful, and let them roll through her fingers. 'All mine! Only think, and yesterday I was thinking how delightful it must be to have even one gold chain to hang round my neck! All mine!'

'Has your mother seen them, Molly?'

'Yes; she knew that there were things somewhere, but

my father kept them put away. Mother didn't want jewels and chains. They came to us from grandfather, who sailed to the East Indies and brought them home. Look at the dainty delicate work!' She held up a chain most wonderful for its fine small work. 'Did you ever see anything more beautiful?'

I turned away. The sight of the treasures made me sick. For, you see, they showed me how wide was the gulf between Molly and me.

'You want no jewels, Molly. I wish you were poor with all my heart.'

'Oh, Jack! and so not to have these lovely things? That is cruel of you. And, oh! Jack, I am to go to the Assembly to-morrow evening.'

'So the Captain tells me.'

'At last. Victory and Amanda'—Victory was the daughter of the Curate of St. Nicholas, and Amanda was the daughter of the doctor—'have been already, and I have been kept at home. The dear, bewitching Assembly! The music! The dancing! The fine ladies!'

'There will be none finer than you, Molly.'

'That is what the Captain says. I am to wear my gold chains and my jewels. My dress is waiting to be tried on. It came from Norwich. I shall not let you see it till the evening. The hairdresser is engaged for to-morrow afternoon. Victory says that the fine ladies turn up their noses and hide their faces with their fans when the girls of the place pass before them. Why? Victory does not thrust her company upon them. Nor shall I. As for that, I can bear their disdainful looks and their flouts with patience, I dare say.'

'If these are the manners of the Great,' I said, 'give me our own manners.'

'We are not gentlefolk, Jack, you and I and the Captain.

We must not complain. If we intrude upon the Quality they will show what they think of us. To be sure, the Captain says that I could buy up the whole room. But I don't want to buy up anybody. I would rather let them go their own way, so that I may go mine. Jack, if I were a great lady I think I would be kind to a girl who was not so well born, if only she knew her place.'

'You need not be humble, Molly. When they know who you are, and what is your fortune, you will make these fine ladies ashamed.'

'The Captain wants me to marry some great person,' she laughed. 'Oh! If the great person could see me making the bed and baking the apple pie and beating the eggs for the custard, with my sleeves turned up and my apron tied round my waist! What a fine lady I shall make, to be sure!'

'Well, but, Molly, remember that you are rich. You cannot marry anybody in Lynn. You must look higher.'

'Jack, it makes me laugh. How shall I learn to be a great lady? How should I command an army of servants who have had but my faithful black? How should I sit in a gilded coach, who am used to ride a pony or to sail a boat?'

'You will soon get accustomed, Molly, even to a coach and six and running footmen, such as Lord Fylingdale has. You are not like Victory and Amanda, and the rest of the girls of Lynn, portionless and penniless. You must remember the station to which your fortune calls you.'

'Money makes not a gentleman,' she returned. 'Nor a gentlewoman. I know my station. It is here, with my guardian, among my old friends. Well, perhaps I shall not take my place in what you call my station this year—or next year.' Her face cleared, and became once more full of sunshine. 'Jack,' she said, 'has the Captain told

you? No one is to dance with me to-morrow except yourself. We are to have the last minuet and first country dance together. None of the pretty fellows at the Assembly are to speak to me. It is arranged with Mr. Prappet. They may look on with admiration and longing, Mr. Prappet says.'

Since the arrival of our Master of the Ceremonies, Mr. Prappet, the dancing-master of Norwich, he had been giving Molly lessons in those arts of dancing and the carriage of the body, the arms, the face, the head, which are considered to mark the polite world. As for myself, I was called upon to be her partner. Truth to say, I was always better at a hornpipe or a jig than in any of the fashionable dances; but, in a way, I could make shift to go through the steps.

'Now,' she said, 'let us practise once more by ourselves.'

So we stepped out upon the grass, and there—she in her stuff frock, her apron, her hair lying about her neck and shoulders, and I in my workaday garb—we practised the dance which belongs to the Assembly, to Courts, to stately ladies and to gentlemen of birth and rank.

The Captain was more cunning than one could have believed possible. He would produce this girl before the astonished company. They should see that she was more beautiful than any other woman in the whole room; more finely dressed; covered with gold chains and jewels; thus proclaiming herself as an heiress of great wealth. She should dance, at first, with none but one of her own station, or near it, and her old companion. She would first make all the world talk about her; but she should be kept apart. It should be understood that she was not for any of the young fellows of the company. Then, if she attracted the attention of this young nobleman, so virtuous, so pious, and of such rare qualities of heart and head,

the thing which most he desired — her marriage with some man of high position, fit for such a girl—might take place. That was his design, thinking of Lord Fylingdale. If it failed he would withdraw the girl from the company and cast about for some other way.

While we were practising he came into the garden and stood leaning on his stick to look at us.

'Body and bones!' he said; 'you've caught the very trick of it. Prappet has taught you how they do it. Sprawl, Jack; sprawl with a will. Twist and turn your body. Shake your leg, man. It's a fine leg—better than most. Shake it lustily. Slide, Molly, slide; slide with zeal. Slide and bend and twist, and shake your fan. I don't call that dancing! Why, there isn't a lad in any foc'sle couldn't do it better. Give them the hornpipe, Jack, when the sliding and sprawling is finished. Stand up and say, "Ladies, your most obedient. I will now show a dance that is a dance."'

When we finished he went on with his discourse.

'Molly has told you, I suppose. She will dance to-morrow evening with none but you. After the country dance lead her to her chair, and we will walk home beside her.'

'Jack will look very fine among all the beaux,' said Molly, laughing.

Truly, I had not considered the matter of dress, and I stood in my workaday things—to wit, a brown frieze coat with black buttons, a drugget waistcoat, shag breeches, and black stockings. I remembered the grand silk and velvet of the beaux and stood abashed.

'Show him, Captain,' said Molly, laughing, 'what we have got for him.'

The Captain shook his head. 'My mind misgives me,' he said. 'That boy will feel awkward in this new gear.

'IT'S A GENTLEMAN BORN AND BRED.'

However, fine feathers make fine birds. Also fine birds flock together. Since thou art to dance with Molly, my lad, thy rig must do credit to her as well as thyself, so come with me.'

If you believe me, the Captain, who thought of everything, had provided such a dress as might have been worn by any gentleman in the room without discredit. It consisted of a blue coat with silver buttons and silver braid; a waistcoat of pink silk, velvet breeches, and white silk stockings. There was added a gold-laced hat with lace for throat and sleeves.

'So,' said the Captain when I stood before him arrayed in this guise, ''tis a gentleman born and bred, to look upon. Powder thy hair, my lad; tie it with a white ribbon and a large bow. There will not be a fribble in the whole company, even including the poor old atomy, Sir Harry, to compare with you.'

Molly clapped her hands. 'Jack!' she cried, 'if I pretend to be a great lady, you must pretend to be an admiral, at least. Why, sir, I feel as if we had never known you before. As for me—but you shall see.' She sighed. 'It is only for the evening,' she said. 'We shall come home, and I shall put on my old homespun again and you your shag and your frieze. I am Cinderella and you are Cinderella's brother, and the Captain is the Fairy.'

So we laughed and made merry. Yet still I felt that sinking of the heart which weighed upon me from the first night of the great discovery and never left me. There are sailors—I have known them—I think that I am myself one—who know beforehand by such a premonitory sinking when the voyage will be stormy. Nay, there are some who know and can foretell when the ship will be cast away and all her crew drowned in the sea or broken to pieces against the rocks.

I looked into the parlour and found Molly's mother. She sat with her work in her hands, her lips moving, her eyes fixed. And I saw that she was unhappy. She was a homely body always. One could understand that her husband was right in judging that she was not likely to want jewels and gold chains or to show them to advantage. Like many women of the station in which she was born (which was beneath that of her husband), she was unlearned, and could not read; but she was a notable housewife.

'Jack,' she said, coming to herself, 'Molly has told you, I suppose.'

'I have seen her treasures, and have heard that she is to go to the Assembly.'

'She is richer than I suspected. Oh, Jack, she will marry some great man, the Captain says—and so I shall lose my girl—and she is all I have in the world—all I have —all I have!'

She threw her apron over her head—and I slipped away, my heart full of forebodings. It is wonderful to remember these forebodings, because they were so fully justified. Patience! You shall hear.

CHAPTER XIII

MOLLY'S FIRST MINUET

I HAVE now to tell you how Molly made her first public appearance at the Assembly, and how she delighted and pleased the kindly ladies who formed the company.

It was a crowded gathering. Lord Fylingdale, it was known, would be present. Many gentlemen, therefore, who would otherwise have been at the coffee-house, the tavern, or the cockpit, were present in honour of this distinguished visitor, or in the hope of being presented to him. And all the ladies visiting the Spa were there as well, young and old, matrons and maids; the latter, perhaps, permitting themselves dreams of greatness.

His Lordship arrived brave in apparel, tall, handsome, proud, still in early manhood, wearing his star upon his breast. Every girl's heart beat only to think of the chance should she be able to attract the attention and the passion of such a man. He was accompanied (say, followed) by his secretary, our poet—the only poet that our town has produced. The Master of the Ceremonies received him with a profound bow, and, after a few words, conducted him to the chair or throne on which sat the Lady Anastasia with a small court around her. Then the music began, and Lord Fylingdale led out that lady for the minuet. And the company stood around in a circle, admiring. He next danced with the young wife of a Norfolk gentleman and

Member of Parliament, after which he retired and stood apart. Sir Harry followed, dancing twice with a fine show of agility. After him others of lower rank followed. Towards the conclusion of the minuet Molly entered the room, led by her guardian, Captain Crowle, and followed by myself in my new disguise.

The Captain was no better dressed than if he were sitting in the Crown Inn, save that he had exchanged his worsted stockings for white silk. He looked what he was —a simple sailor and commander of a ship. But no one regarded him or myself, because all eyes were turned upon Molly.

She appeared before the stonished Assembly clothed, so to speak, with diamonds and precious stones, glittering in the light of the candles like a crowd of stars. She was covered with jewels. Diamonds were in her head-dress; they were also hanging from her neck; there were rubies and emeralds, sapphires and opals, in her necklace and her bracelets; heavy gold chains, light gold chains, gold chains set with pearls, were hanging about her. She was clothed, I say, from head to foot with gold and with precious stones.

The intention of the Captain was carried out. On her first appearance she proclaimed herself as she stood before them all as an heiress who was able to carry a great fortune upon her back, as the saying is, and to have another great fortune at home. Never before had the company beheld so strange a sight; a girl wearing so much wealth and such splendid jewels for a simple Assembly.

Then from lip to lip was passed the words, 'Who is she? What is her name? Where does she come from? What is her family? What is the meaning of this resplendent show of gems and gold? Are they real?

Why does she wear them?' And for the whole of that evening, while Molly was in the room, no one thought of anything except this wonderful vision of dazzling jewels. The eyes of the whole company followed her about, and in their conversation they talked of nothing else. For, of all things, this was the most unexpected, and, to all the other maidens, the most disconcerting. They were plain, country girls, while Molly was a goddess. To say that she outshone them all is to say nothing. There was no comparison possible.

Truly the Captain was right. There was no one in that room who could compare with Molly—either for beauty or for bravery of apparel. As for her beauty, it was of the kind the power of which women seem not to understand. Men, who do understand it, call it loveliness. Venus herself—Helen of Troy—Fair Rosamond—Jane Shore—all the fair women of whom we have heard, possessed, I am sure, this loveliness. Your regular beauty of straight features of which so much is made doth never, I think, attract mankind so surely, or so quickly; doth never hold men so strongly; doth never make them so mad with love. It is the woman of the soft eyes, the sweet eyes, the eyes that are sometimes hazel and sometimes blue, the eyes full of light and sunshine, the eyes where Cupid plays; the lips that are always ready to smile, the lips so rosy red, so round and small; the cheek that is like a peach for softness and for bloom, touched with a natural pink and red; the rounded chin; the forehead white and not too large; the light brown hair that is almost flaxen, curling naturally, but disposed by art. Such a woman was Molly.

Yet not a weakly thin slip of a girl. She was tall and strong; her arms were round and white as a woman's should be, but they were big as well, as if they could do

man's work—they were strengthened and rounded by the oars which she had handled from childhood. Her ample cheek wanted no daub of paint; it had a fine healthy colour, like a damask rose, but more delicate; her eyes were full and bright; there was no girl in the place, not even among the country ladies, could show a face and figure so strong, so finely moulded, of such large and generous charms. When the men gazed upon her they gasped; when the women gazed upon her their hearts sank low with envy.

How am I to describe her dress? I know that her head was made in what they called the English fashion, with a structure of lace, thin wires and round rolls on cushions, with ringlets at the sides and pinned to a small cap on the top.

All I can safely say about her dress is that she wore a gown of cherry-coloured silk, with gold flowers over a petticoat of pink silk adorned by a kind of network of gold lace; that her sleeves were wide with a quantity of lace—I have never carried a cargo of lace, and therefore I know not its value; that her gloves were of white silk; that her arms were loaded with bracelets which clanged and clashed when she moved; and that chains of gold hung round her neck and over her shoulders.

The Master of Ceremonies received us with distinction.

'Captain Crowle,' he said loudly, 'you have too long withheld your lovely ward from the Assembly of the Spa. I would invite her to dance the last minuet with Mr. Pentecrosse.'

All this had been arranged beforehand. The people gazed curiously, and began to press around us as I advanced with Molly's hand in mine.

'Be not abashed, Jack,' whispered the old Captain. 'They know not what to think. Show them how the

dance should be done. Slide and sprawl, my lad. Sprawl with a will and both together,' he added hoarsely, 'with a yo-heave-ho!'

Then the music began again, and Molly stood opposite to me—and the dance began.

For my own part I obeyed the Captain's admonition. I endeavoured to forget the people who were looking on—I tried to think that we were rehearsing in the garden—and feeling confidence return, I began to slide and sprawl with a will.

All the people were gathered round us in a circle. The ladies, holding their fans before their faces, tittered and giggled audibly. The men, for their part, laughed openly, making observations not intended to be good-natured. They were laughing at me! And I was getting on, as I believed, so well. However, I did not know the cause of their merriment, and carried on the sprawling with a greater will than ever.

I am sorry now, whenever I think upon it, that Molly had not a better partner. For my performance, which was quite correct, and in every particular exactly what Mr. Prappet had taught me, was distinguished, I learned afterwards, by a certain exaggeration of gesture due to my desire to be correct, which made the dance ridiculous. If only I had been permitted to give them a hornpipe! What had I, a mere tarpaulin, as they say, to do with fine clothes, fashionable sliding and sprawling, and the pretence of fashionable manners?

You must not think that Molly, though it was her first appearance in public, though she wore these fine things for the first time, though all eyes were upon her, was in the least degree abashed. She bore herself with modesty and an assumed unconsciousness of what people were saying and how they were looking at her, which certainly did her

great credit. And I am quite sure that, whatever my own performance, hers was full of grace, ease, and the dignity which makes this dance so fit for great lords and ladies, and so unfit for rustic swains and shepherdesses. She smiled upon her partner as sweetly as if we were together in the garden; she played her fan as prettily as if we were rehearsing the dance with mirth and merriment —it was a costly fan, with paintings upon it and a handle set with pearls.

The dance was finished at last, and I led my partner to the end of the room, where the maids sat all in a row with white aprons and white caps—among them Molly's woman, Nigra—to repair any disorder to the head or to the dress caused by the active movements of the dance.

And then they all began to talk. I could hear fragments and whole sentences. They were talking about us.

'Who is she, then?' asked one lady impatiently. 'Where does she come from?'

'Perhaps a sea-nymph,' replied a gentleman gallantly, 'brought from the ocean by the god Neptune, who stands over yonder. One can smell the seaweed.'

'And the gems and chains come, I suppose, from old wrecks.'

'Or,' said the ancient beau, Sir Harry, 'a wood nymph from the train of Diana. In that case the old gentleman may be the god Pan. The nymphs of Diana, it appears, have lately taken lessons in the fashionable dance. As yet, unfortunately——' He shrugged his shoulders.

'I cannot choose but hear, Jack,' said Molly. 'Let us make as if we heard nothing.'

'She is an actress,' said another lady. 'I saw her last night in the play. She personated an impudent maid-servant. The chains and gems are false; one can see that

with half an eye. They are what those vagabond folk call stage properties.'

Yet another took up the parable. 'She should be put to the door, or she should stand in a white apron with the maids. What? We are decent and respectable ladies, I hope.'

'They are not gems at all,' observed a young fellow, anxious to display his wit. 'They are the lamps from the garden. She has cut them down and hung them round herself. See the pretty colours—red—green—blue.'

'Let her put them back again, then, and leave the company into which she dares to intrude.' This was the spiteful person who had seen her on the stage and knew her for one of the strollers. The resentment of the ladies against a woman who presumed to be more finely dressed than themselves, and to display more jewels than they themselves possessed, or even hoped to possess, was deeper and louder than one could believe possible. Yet this was a polite Assembly, and these ladies had learned the manners which we are taught to copy, at a distance—we who are not gentlefolk.

'Jack,' said Molly, 'these are the flouts of which the Captain warned us. Lead me round the room. Right through the middle of them, so that they may see with half an eye how false are my jewels.'

I obeyed. They fell back, making a lane for us, and talking about us after we had passed through them, without the least affectation of a whisper.

They had an opportunity, however, of seeing the dress and the trappings more closely.

'My dear,' said one, 'the jewels are real. I am sure they are real. On the stage they wear large glass things. Those are brilliants of the first water in her hair, and those are true pearls about her neck.'

'And her dress,' said another, 'is of the finest silk; and did you see the gold lace in front of her petticoat? The dress and the jewels, they must be worth—oh! worth a whole estate. Who can she be?'

'Such a woman,' observed an elderly matron very sweetly, 'would probably be ashamed to say where she found those things. Oh! But the Master of the Ceremonies must be warned. She must not be tolerated here again.'

'How kind they are, Jack!' whispered Molly.

'Who is the fellow with her?' I heard next.

'He sells flounders and eels in the market. I have seen him in a blue coat and long white sleeves and an apron.'

'No. He is a clerk in a counting-house.'

'Not at all. The fellow, like the girl, belongs to the strollers. I saw him last night laying a carpet on the stage.'

'A personable fellow, with a well-turned leg.' This compliment made me blush. 'It is his misfortune that he must be coupled with so impudent a baggage.'

'You see, Jack,' said Molly, 'it all comes back to me.'

So we went on walking round the room, pretending to hear nothing. We met Victory, also walking round the room with her beau, a young merchant of the town. She, fortunate girl! had no jewels with which to excite the envy, hatred, and malice of the ladies. She was unmolested, though not a gentlewoman by station.

'Molly,' she said, 'you are splendid. I have never seen such a show of jewels. But you will drive them mad with envy. Hateful creatures! I see them turning green. The minuet was beautiful, my dear. Oh! Jack, you made me laugh. Never was seen such posturing. The men are angry, because they think you meant to make them ridiculous.'

Thus one may learn unpalatable truth, even from friends. My 'posturing,' then, as the girl called it, was ridiculous. And I thought my performance correct, and quite in the style of the highest fashion!

Then the Captain joined in. 'Famous!' he said. 'Jack, you rolled about like a porpoise at the bows. Never believe that a sailor cannot show the way at a dance. Molly, my dear, you were not so brisk as Jack. But it was very well—very well indeed. The women cannot contain themselves for spite and envy. What did I tell you, my dear?'

CHAPTER XIV

MOLLY'S COUNTRY DANCE

MEANTIME another kind of conversation was going on, which we could not hear.

'My Lord,' the poet bustled up, with his cringing familiarity. 'Yonder is the heiress of whom I spoke.'

'Humph! She is well enough for a rustical beauty. Her shape is good, if too full for the fashion; her cheeks bespeak the dairy, and her shoulders tell of the milking-pail. Why does she wear as many jewels and charms as an antiquated duchess at a Coronation? I suppose they are real. But there are too many of them.'

'They are real. I would vouch for them, my Lord,' he added earnestly. 'All that I have told you is most true. A greater heiress you will not find in the whole country. Even with the jewels upon her she could buy up all the women in the room.'

'I would make sure upon that point. They say that she has ships, lands——'

'And money. Accumulations. My Lord, if you will not take my word for it—why should you?—ask her guardian. There he stands.'

'The old salt now beside her, like a Cerberus of the quarter-deck? Who is the other—the fellow who danced with her—his actions like those of a graceful elephant. Is he one of her lovers?'

'She has no lovers. Her guardian permits none. The young lady has been kept in the house. That man is her servant; he is nothing but a mate in one of her ships. Captain Crowle would not allow a fellow of that position to make love to his ward.'

'Humph!' said his Lordship. 'Bring the old man here.'

The Captain obeyed the summons somewhat abashed. But my Lord put him at his ease. 'You may retire, Mr. Semple. I would converse with Captain Crowle.' Then he turned to the Captain with the greatest affability.

'Our good friend Mr. Semple tells me, Captain, that yonder beauty—the toast, if I mistake not, of our young gentlemen to-night—is none other than your ward.'

'At your service, my Lord.'

'Nay, Captain. It is I who should be at her service. Frankly, she does honour to your town. Had we discovered Miss Molly, there would have been no need to discuss the magical waters of the Spa. May I inquire into the name and the conditions of her family?'

'As for her name, sir, it is plain Molly Miller. As for her parentage, her father was a ship-owner and a merchant. Though a citizen and a free man of Lynn, he was as substantial a man as may be found in the Port of London. Her mother, my first cousin, was the daughter and the grand-daughter and the sister and the cousin of men who have been captains in the merchant service of Lynn—for many generations. Most of them lie at the bottom of the sea. We are plain folk, my Lord, and homely. But Providence hath thought fit to bless our handiwork, and —you see my ward before you—I hope she does not shame the company?'

'On the contrary, Captain Crowle, she adorns and beautifies the company not only with her good looks, which are singular and extraordinary, but also with her

fine dress and her jewels, which have won for her already the envy of every woman in the Assembly.'

'There are as many jewels in the locker as have come out of it for to-night,' said the Captain sturdily.

'Ay? Ay? And there are ships, I hear—many ships. Our friend Mr. Semple speaks of the lady's wealth with as much respect as he speaks of her beauty.'

'He well may—Molly is the greatest ship-owner of Lynn. She is also owner of many houses in the town and of many broad acres outside the town. And she will have, when she marries, in addition, a fortune of many thousand pounds.'

'She is, then, indeed an heiress. I wish her, for your sake, Captain Crowle, a worthy husband. But it is a grave responsibility. There are hawks about always looking for a rich wife—to restore fortunes battered by evil courses. You must take care, Captain Crowle.'

'I mean to take care.'

'Perhaps among the merchants of this port?' The Captain shook his head.

'Or among the gentlemen of Norfolk?' The Captain shook his head.

'They drink too hard—and they live too hard.'

'Perhaps among the scholars and divines of Cambridge?'

'They are not fit mates for a lively girl.'

'Captain, I perceive that you are difficult to please. Even for your charming ward you must not expect a miracle in the creation of a new Adam fit for this new Eve. Be reasonable, Captain Crowle.' His Lordship spoke so pleasantly and laughed with so much good nature that the Captain was encouraged, and spoke out his mind as to an old friend.

'No, no, I want no miracle. I desire that my girl, who is a loving girl, with a heart of gold, should be wooed and

married by a gentleman whom she will respect and honour —not a drinker nor a gambler nor a profligate. She will bring him a fortune which is great even for persons of quality.'

My Lord bowed gravely. 'You are right, Captain Crowle, to entertain these opinions. Do not change them under any temptations. One would only wish that the lady may find such a mate. But, Captain, remember—I say it not in an unfriendly spirit—class weds with class. Sir, they are about to begin the country dance; let us look on.'

The company began to take their places.

'Captain Crowle,' Lord Fylingdale pointed to the dancers, repeating his words: 'class weds with class—class dances with class. At the head of the set stands Sir Harry the Evergreen. His partner is a lady of good family. Next to them are others of good family. Those young people who are now taking their places lower down are—what are they?'

'Two of them are the daughters of the doctor and the Vicar—good girls both.'

'Good girls, doubtless. But, Captain Crowle, not gentlefolk, and there, I observe, your lovely ward, Captain Crowle, takes her place modestly and last of all. Who dances with her?'

'It is young John Pentecrosse, son of our schoolmaster, mate on board one of Molly's ships. He is her playfellow. They have been together since childhood.'

'Perhaps he would be more. Take care, Captain—take care.' So he turned away as if no longer interested in the girl. But Sam Semple remained behind.

'Sir,' he said to the Captain, 'his Lordship took particular notice of your ward. "Miss Molly," said my Lord, "is a rustic nymph dressed for the Court of Venus.

Never before have I seen a face of more heavenly beauty." Those were his Lordship's very words.' But Sam Semple was always a ready liar.

'Ay, my lad. They are fine words; but fine words butter no parsnips. "Class weds with class," that's what he said to me.'

'Surely, Captain, with such a face and such a fortune Miss Molly is raised to the rank . . . say, of Countess. Would a coronet satisfy you for your ward? I mean nothing'—here he glanced at the figure of his Lordship. 'Nothing—of course not—what could I mean? How well a coronet, Captain, would become that lovely brow!'

Everybody knows that the country dance should continue until the couple at the bottom have arrived at the top and have had their turn. Everybody knows, too, that the country dance, unlike the minuet, is joined by the whole company, with only so much deference to rank as to give the better sort the highest places at the beginning. They were given this evening to the ladies of the county who could boast of their gentility, and, to do them justice, did boast loudly of it, comparing their own families and that of their husbands with those of other ladies present. It seems to me, indeed, that it is better to have no coat of arms and no grandfathers if the possession leads to so much jealousy, backbaiting, and slander. All these ladies, however, united in one point, viz., that of scorn and contempt for those girls of Lynn who ventured to join the Assembly or to walk in the gardens. They showed this contempt in many ways, especially by whispering and giggling when one of the natives passed them. 'Is it tar that one smells so strong?' if one of the sea-captain's daughters was standing near, they would ask. Or, 'Madam, I think there must be an apothecary's shop in the Assembly,' if it was the doctor's daughter, Amanda Worship. And at the

country dance they refused to take the hand of these girls.

Their greatest possible insult, however, was offered to Molly. It was a good dance tune, played with spirit—the tune they call 'Hey go mad!' We moved gradually higher up. At last we stood at the top, and our turn came to end the dance.

Imagine our discomfiture at this point when the whole of these kind ladies and their partners left their places and so broke up the dance. We were left alone at the top, while at the bottom were the other two girls of Lynn, Victory and Amanda, with their partners.

'It's a shame!' cried Victory, aloud. 'Do they call these manners?'

'Never mind,' said Amanda, also aloud; 'it's because you outshine them all, Molly.'

But the mischief was done, and the dance was broken up.

Molly flushed crimson. I thought she would say something sharp. Nay, I have known her cuff and box the ear of a man or maid for less, and I feared at this moment that she would in like manner avenge the insult. But she restrained herself, and said nothing.

Meantime, the ladies who had committed this breach of polite manners stood together and laughed aloud, pretending some great joke among themselves; but their eyes showed the nature of the joke, and their triumph over a woman who, as Amanda said, outshone them all.

'Your turn will come,' I said.

'I think, Jack,' said my girl quickly, 'that my chair must be waiting. The Captain said that I was to go after the first country dance.'

But a great surprise awaited her and the ladies who had played her this agreeable and diverting trick, for Lord

Fylingdale stepped forward, the people falling back to make way for him. He drew himself up before Molly and made her a profound bow. The Captain walked beside him, evidently by invitation.

'Miss Molly,' he said loudly, 'your worthy guardian has informed me of your name and quality. We wanted, in the company at the Spa, to make it complete, the heiress of Lynn. It is fitting that this borough, which is always young and flourishing, should be represented by one graced with so many charms.'

Molly curtsied with more dignity than one could have expected. See what a dancing-master can effect in a fortnight. 'Your Lordship,' she said, 'does me too much honour. The reception which I have met with from these ladies had not, I confess, prepared me for your kindness.'

'I shall humbly ask the favour of a dance with you, Miss Molly, on the next occasion.' The fans were now all agitation; 'twas like a flutter in a dovecot. 'We shall see if we shall be deserted when our turn comes.' Some of the ladies hid their faces with their fans; some blushed for shame; some bit their lips with vexation; all darted looks of envy and hatred upon the cause of the open rebuke.

'Sir'—Lord Fylingdale turned severely to the Master of the Ceremonies—'the rules of polite society should be obeyed at Lynn as much as at Bath and Tunbridge Wells. Look to it, sir; I request you.'

So saying, he took Molly's hand, and led her to the chair outside.

CHAPTER XV

THE CARD ROOM

When Molly's chair was carried away, Lord Fylingdale returned to the Assembly. The music had begun another moving and merry tune—that called 'Richmond Ball'—the couples were taking their places, the young fellows dancing already as they stood waiting, with hands and feet and even shoulders all together, their partners laughing at them, and, with hands upon their frocks, pretending to set in the joy and the merriment of their hearts. And I believe that the withdrawal of Molly made them all much happier.

Two or three of the ladies standing apart were discussing the public rebuke just administered. They were angry, being ladies who conceited themselves on the score of manners, and were proud of their families.

'Not the whole House of Lords,' said one, loud enough for his Lordship to hear, 'shall make me give my hand to a sailor's wench. Let her stick to her tar and her pitch. A pretty thing, indeed!'

'I hope,' said another, agitating her fan violently, 'that his Lordship does not put the ladies of Norfolk on the same level as the girls of King's Lynn.'

'Dear madam,' said a third, 'Lord Fylingdale called her an heiress—the heiress of Lynn. An heiress does not carry all her fortune on her back. Do you not think—some of

us have sons—that we might, perhaps, receive this person with kindness?'

'No, madam. I will not be on any terms with this creature. In my family we consort with none but gentlefolk.'

'Indeed, madam! But a hundred years ago your family, if I mistake not, were ploughing and ditching on the farms of my family.'

Molly seemed like to prove a firebrand indeed. Lord Fylingdale, however, passed through them without any sign of hearing a word. He looked round; he observed that the next dance had begun, and that every lady was touching the hands of those who were not of her own exalted family. So that his admonition was bearing fruit. He then left the Long Room and went into the Card Room. Here he found the Lady Anastasia sitting at a table surrounded by a little crowd of players. She held the bank. In the excitement of the play her eyes sparkled; her bosom heaved; her colour went and came visibly beneath the paint on her cheeks; her lips became pale and then returned to their proper colour; she rapped the table with her fingers. She was enjoying, in fact, the rapture which fills the heart of the gambler and makes play the only thing desirable in life. Perhaps the preacher could imagine no greater misery for the gamester than a heaven in which there were no cards.

The game which the Lady Anastasia introduced to these country gentlemen and the company generally was one called hazard, which is, I believe, commonly played by gamesters of fashion. Indeed, as was afterwards learned, this very lady had been by name presented by the Grand Jury of Middlesex for keeping a bank at the game of hazard on Sundays against all comers. At Lynn she kept the bank every evening except Sunday. It is a game

which, more than any other, is said to lure on the player, so that a man who, out of simple curiosity, sets a guinea and calls a main, finds himself, after a few evenings of alternating fortune, winning and losing in turn, so much attracted by the game that he is only happy when he is playing. I know not how many gamblers for life were made during the short time when this lady held the bank. Wonderful to relate, no one seemed to consider that she was doing anything wrong. She was seen at morning prayers every day; she drank the waters of the Spa; she walked in the gardens, taking tea and talking scandal with the greatest affability; and in the evenings, when she kept the bank, it was with a face so full of smiles, with so much appearance of rejoicing when a player won, and so much kindness and sympathy when a player lost, that no one asked whether she herself won or lost.

For my own part, I do not understand how the bank can be held without great risks and losses. But I have been assured, by one who knows, that the chances are greatly in favour of the bank, and that this lady, so highly placed, and of such charming manners, was simply playing to win, and did win very largely, if not every evening, then in the course of a week or a month.

'We are all friends here,' she said, taking her place and dividing the pile of money, which constituted her bank, into two heaps, right and left. At her right hand stood a man of cold and harsh appearance, who took no interest in the game, but, like a machine, cried the main and the chance, and gave or took the odds, and, with a rake, either swept the stakes into the bank when the player lost, or pushed out the amount won by the player to his seat. They called him the croupier, which is, I believe, a French word. He came from London.

'Since we are all friends here,' Lady Anastasia went on,

'we need not observe the precautions that are necessary in London, where players have been known to withdraw part of their stakes when they have lost, and to add more when they have won.'

Among the players seated at the table—there were many others standing, who ventured a guinea or so, and, having won or lost, went away—was the ancient youth of fashion, Sir Harry, who had now exchanged the dance for the Card Room. There was also the gentleman of loud voice and boisterous manners, called Colonel Lanyon.

Sir Harry was the first to call for the dice-box, and the dice.

'Seven's the main,' he cried, laying as many guineas on the table. He then rattled the dice and threw. 'Five!' he cried.

'Five!' repeated the croupier. 'Seven's the main, five is the chance.'

The rule of the game is that the player throws again and continues to throw. If he throws seven first, he loses; if he throws five first, he wins. But there are introduced certain other rules, so that the game is not so easy and simple as it seems. Some throws are called 'nicks,' and some are called 'crabs.' If a nick is thrown, the caster pays to the bank one main. If crabs, the dice-box goes to another player. But any bystander may bet on the odds. I know not myself what the odds are, but the regular player knows, and the croupier calls them; in some cases the bystanders may not bet against the bank, but I do not know these cases. I know only the simple rules, having seen it played in the Card Room.

Lord Fylingdale looked on with an air of cold indifference. He saw, if he observed anything, that Colonel Lanyon and Sir Harry were playing high, but that the rest of the company were timidly venturing single guineas

at each cast. Some of them were women, and these were the fiercest and most intent upon the game. Most of them were young men, those who commonly spent their days in all those kinds of sport which allow of bets and the winning and losing of money. We have heard of gaming-tables in London at which whole fortunes are sometimes lost at a single sitting; of young men who sit down rich and rise up poor—even destitute. The young men of Norfolk certainly do not gamble away their estates in this blind fashion; but it must be owned that their chief pleasures are those on which they can place a wager, and that the pastimes which do not allow of a bet are not regarded with favour. For the ladies of the towns a game of quadrille or whist is the amusement whenever two or three can be got together. It must, however, be confessed that the gentlemen are fonder of drinking away their evenings than of playing cards. The games of ombre, hazard, basset, faro, and others in which large sums of money are staked, are commonly played by the people of the town, not of the country.

Lord Fylingdale stood for awhile looking over the table. Then he pulled out his purse—a long and well-filled purse—and laid down twenty guineas, calling the main 'Nine.' He threw. 'Nick,' cried the croupier in his hard, monotonous note. His lordship had lost. He took out another handful of guineas and laid them on the table. Again he lost. The players looked up, expectant. They wanted to see how a noble lord would receive this reverse of fortune. In their own case it would have been met with curses on their luck, deep and loud and repeated. To their astonishment he showed no sign of interest in the event. He only put up his purse and resumed his attitude of looking on.

At eleven o'clock the music stopped; the dancing was

over. Nothing remained but the punch with which some of the company concluded the evening. It was provided at the expense of the gentlemen.

The players began to recount their experiences. Fortune, which had smiled on a few, seemed to have frowned on most.

Then Lord Fylingdale offered another surprise.

'Ladies,' he said, 'I venture to offer you the refreshment of a glass of punch. Gentlemen, may I hope that you will join the ladies in this conclusion to the evening? I would willingly, if you will allow me, drink to your good luck at the card table. Let the county of Norfolk show that Fortune, which has favoured this part of the country so signally in other respects, has also been as generous in this. I am not myself a Norfolk, but a Gloucestershire man. I come from the other side of the country. Let me, however, in this gathering of all that is polite and of good family in the county be regarded as no stranger, but a friend.'

By this time the punch was brought in, two steaming great bowls. The gentlemen ladled it out for the ladies and for themselves and all stood expectant.

'I give you a toast,' said his Lordship. 'We are entertained by the ancient and venerable Borough of Lynn; we must show our gratitude to our entertainers. I am informed that these rooms, these gardens, the music and the singers, together with the Pump Room, have all been designed, built, collected, and arranged for the company, namely, ourselves. Let us thank the good people of Lynn. And since the town has sent to our Assembly to-night its loveliest flower, the young heiress whom I shall call the Lady of Lynn, let us drink to her as the representative of her native place. Gentlemen, I offer you as a toast, 'Sweet Molly, the Lady of Lynn!'"

The gentlemen drank it with enthusiasm, the ladies looked at each other doubtfully. They had not come to Lynn expecting to hear extolled the beauty of a girl of the place, the town of sailors, ships, quays, cargoes, casks, cranes, and merchants, the town of winding streets and narrow courts where the deserted houses were falling to pieces. The county families went sometimes to Norwich, where there is very good society; and sometimes to Bury, where there are assemblies in the winter; but no ladies ever came to Lynn, where there were no assemblies, no card parties, and no society.

After this toast, the Lady Anastasia withdrew with the other ladies. Lord Fylingdale led her to her chair and then called for his own.

The gentlemen remained sitting over their punch and talking.

'Who,' said one, 'is this sweet Molly? Who is this great heiress? Who is the Lady of Lynn?'

'I never knew,' said another, 'that there was a lady in Lynn at all.'

'You have been in the Card Room all the evening,' said another. 'She danced the last minuet. Where can she be hidden that no one has seen her before? Gentlemen, 'twas a vision of Venus herself, or the fair Diana, in a silk frock and a flounced petticoat, with pearls and diamonds, and precious stones. An heiress? An heiress in Lynn?'

The poet, Sam Semple, who was present, pricked up his ears. The punch had begun to loosen his tongue.

'Gentlemen,' he said, 'by your leave. You are all strangers at Lynn Regis. Norwich you know, and Bury and Swaffham, and perhaps other towns in the county. But, with submission, Lynn you do not know.'

'Why, sir, as for not knowing Lynn, what can a body learn of the place that is worth knowing?'

'You think that it is a poor place, with a few colliers and fishing smacks, and a population of sailors and vintners.' The poet took another glass of punch and drank it off to clear his head. 'Well, sir, you are mistaken. From Lynn goes forth every year a noble fleet of ships. Whither do they go? To all the ports of Europe. From Lynn they go out; to Lynn they return. To whom do these ships belong? Is a ship worth nothing? To whom do their cargoes belong? Is the cargo of a tall three-master worth nothing? Now, gentlemen, if most of these ships belong to one girl; if they are freighted for one girl; if half the trade of Lynn is in the hands of this girl's guardian; if for twenty years the revenues from the trade have been rolling up—what is that girl but a great heiress?'

'Is that the case with—with sweet Molly?' asked a young fellow who had been drinking before the punch appeared, and now spoke with a thick voice. 'Is she the heiress and the Lady of Lynn?'

'She is nothing less,' Sam Semple replied. 'As for her fortune, I believe, if she wished it, she could buy up half this county.'

'And she is unmarried. . . . Egad!' it was the same young fellow who spoke, 'he will be a lucky man who gets her.'

'A lucky man indeed,' said Sam; 'but she is above your reach, let me tell you,' he added impudently, because the other was a gentleman.

'Above my reach? Take that,' he threw the glass of punch in the poet's face. 'Above my reach? Mine? Who the devil is this fellow? The owner of a ship, or a dozen ships, with their stinking cargoes and their cheating trade, above my reach? Why——' Here he would have fallen upon the offender, but was restrained by his friends.

Sam stood open-mouthed, looking about him dumbfoundered, the punch streaming over his cheeks.

'You'd best go, sir,' said one of them. 'I know not who you are. But if you are a gentleman you can send your friend to-morrow. If not'—he laughed—'in our county if a gentleman falls out with one whom he cannot fight with swords, he is not too proud to meet him with stick or fist. In any case you had better go—and that without delay.'

The poet turned and ran. No hostile meeting followed. Sam could not send a challenge, being no gentleman, and, as you have already seen, he was not naturally inclined for the ordeal by battle in any other form.

The young man was one Tom Rising, whose estates lay near Swaffham. He was well known as the best and most fearless rider in the whole county; he was the keenest sportsman; he knew where to find fox, hare, badger, ferret, stoat, or weasel; he knew where to put up a pheasant or a covey of partridges; he could play at all manly sports; he was a wild, fearless, reckless, deboshed young fellow, whom everybody loved and everybody feared; always ready with a blow or an oath; afraid of nothing if he set his heart upon anything. You shall see presently that he set his heart upon one thing and that he failed. For the rest, a comely, tall, and proper young man of four-and-twenty or so, whose careless dress, disordered necktie, and neglected head sufficiently indicated his habits, even if his wanton rolling eyes, loose lip, and cheeks always flushed with wine, did not loudly proclaim the manner of his life and the train of his thoughts.

When Sam was gone he turned again to the bowl.

In the morning it was reported that there had been wagers, and that a great deal of money had been won and lost. Some said that Colonel Lanyon, one of the gentle-

men from London, had lost a great sum; others said that Tom Rising was the heaviest loser. I judge from what I now know that Tom Rising lost, that evening, more than his estates would bring him in a whole quarter. And I am further of opinion that Colonel Lanyon did not lose anything except a piece of paper with some figures on it, which he handed, ostentatiously proclaiming the amount, which was very large, to his honourable friend, Sir Harry Malyns, Baronet.

CHAPTER XVI

HIS LORDSHIP'S INTENTIONS

In the morning the newly laid out Gardens were the resort —after prayers, the Pump Room, the pastrycook, the bookseller, and the draper—of all the ladies and of many of the men—those, indeed, who preferred the pleasures of society and the discourse of the ladies to the dull talk of the Cambridge Fellows and the canons of Ely in the coffee-house, or the noisy disputes and the wagers of the tavern, or the sport of the cockpit. The Gardens became the haunt of scandal and of gossip; here a thousand stories were invented; here characters were taken away and reputations dragged in the mud; the ladies in their morning dress walked about under the trees and in the alleys, diverting themselves as best they could. At eleven the music played in the gallery outside the Long Room. On some days a public breakfast was offered; on other days there was a lottery or raffle, in which everybody took a huge interest. Sometimes the company were content to walk or sit under the trees, talking; sometimes there was singing in the Long Room; or perhaps the Rev. Mr. Purdon would read aloud to a small circle from some book of verse or of romance; or there were parties made up for voyages up the river; or a play was bespoke by the general consent. In a word, it was the resort of a multitude who had nothing to do but to divert themselves;

they were full of scandal about each other; a young fellow could not squeeze a girl's hand but it was whispered all over the place that he had run away with her; and though one would think, to hear them, that every woman of the company was ready to tear to pieces every other woman, yet they assumed so pretty a disguise, and professed so much interest and affection and friendship for each other, that one was inclined to believe the scandal and gossip to be a pretence or masque to hide their true feelings.

It was natural that in walking about the Gardens the people should divide themselves into parties of two, or three, or more. But in the morning after Molly's first appearance these parties consisted of groups, each of half a dozen and more, talking about last night's unexpected apparition of a woman more finely dressed than any of them, with jewels and gold chains which made the hearts of all who beheld to sink with envy.

'The men, they say, admired her face. Lord Fylingdale himself, they say, toasted her by name as an heiress. What kind of heiress can she be? And there was a quarrel about her over punch. Tom Rising poured the whole of the punch bowl upon the head of a gentleman said to be his Lordship's secretary. This morning they met outside the walls. The gentleman is run through the body and cannot live.' 'No, through the shoulder and will recover.' 'I heard that it was in the arm, and that he will be well again in a week. But the heiress—who is the heiress?' And so they went on. You may be sure that Sam Semple found it prudent to keep out of the way. There was, therefore, no one to tell these curious ladies who the heiress was, or what her fortune might be. Mostly they inclined to the belief that a thousand pounds would cover the whole of her inheritance, and that Lord

Fylingdale meant no more than an act of politeness to the town, which certainly had done its best to entertain the company. And so on.

Presently there appeared, walking side by side, Lord Fylingdale himself and Lady Anastasia. He carried his hat under his arm, and his cane dangled from his right wrist; his face was as cold and as devoid of emotion as when the night before he had rebuked the company.

They passed along under the trees conversing. When they passed or met any others they lowered their voices. Their conversation—I will tell you in due course how I learned it—was important and serious. It was of greater importance to Molly and to me, had I known it, than one could imagine or suspect. And this was, in effect, the substance of their discourse.

'I know,' she said, 'that you have some design in coming to Lynn, and that you intend me to assist you. Otherwise why should you drag me here, over vile roads, to a low lodging, in the company of fox-hunters and their ladies? Otherwise, indeed, why should you come here yourself?'

'The healing waters of the Spa,' he suggested gravely.

'You have nothing the matter with you. Nothing ever hurts you. If other men drink and rake all night they show it in their faces and their swollen bodies. But you —why, you look as if you lived like a saint or a hermit in a cell.'

'Yet—to prevent disease—to anticipate, so to speak.'

'Ludovick, you have no longer any confidence in me. You tell me to come here—I come. You order me to set up a bank here every night. I have done so. What has happened? Sir Harry and the Colonel lose and win with each other and with me. You look in and throw away fifty guineas with your lofty air, as if they mattered nothing. These country bumpkins look on and wonder.

They are lost in admiration at a man who can lose fifty guineas without so much as a word or a gesture. And then they put down—a simple guinea. To please you, Ludovick, I have become a guinea-hunter. And I am standing at great expense, and I am losing the profits of my London Bank.'

'The change of air will do you good, Anastasia. You were looking pale in town. Besides, there were too many rumours afloat.'

'If I had your confidence, I should not care for anything. I am willing to be your servant, Ludovick, your tool. I endure the Colonel and I tolerate Sir Harry with his nauseous old compliments. For your sake I suffer them to bring discredit on my name and my play. But I do not consent to be your slave.'

'My mistress, not my servant,' he murmured, touching her fingers.

She laughed scornfully. 'Will you tell me, then, if you wish me to do anything more for you? Am I to continue picking up the guineas of these hard-fisted rustics? Am I to figure in their stupid minuets, whenever they have their Assembly? How long am I to stay here?'

'You ask too many questions, Anastasia. Still, to show you that I place confidence in you, although you mistrust me, I will answer some of them. Of course, it is no news to you that I have at this moment no rents—nothing to receive and nothing to sell.'

'I have known that for two years. You best know how you continue to keep up your establishment.'

'Partly by the help of your table, dear Anastasia. I am not ungrateful, believe me.' Again he touched her fingers, and again she drew herself away.

'You have remarked upon the danger of having the Colonel and old Sir Harry about you. Both are a good

deal blown upon. I would not suffer them to be with you again at Bath or Tunbridge Wells. In this place they are safe. Both of them will encourage the play and set an example of high play and great winnings. One of them will also be ready to challenge any who refuses to pay. The Colonel has his uses. As for Harry, he is useful to me in other ways. Like his Reverence.'

'The odious, vile, crawling worm!'

'Quite so. Sir Harry and the Reverend Mr. Purdon are useful in assuring the world of my own virtuous character.'

'Why do you want to appear virtuous? You, whose character is notorious.'

'I have my reasons. Anastasia, I will place my whole confidence in you. Perhaps you saw at the Assembly the other night a certain bourgeoise—a citizen's daughter—a girl dressed in the clothes of the fashion, her face as red as her hands——'

'I saw a very remarkable woman, Ludovick—her face and her figure fine enough to make her fortune. She was covered with jewels, which they told me were false.'

'They told you wrongly, Anastasia. They are real—diamonds, pearls, rubies, gold chains and all—real. The girl is a great heiress. The people here do not know how great, or the whole country would be on bended knees before the goddess. But I know. And on her account—look you—on her account am I here.'

The Lady Anastasia changed her manner suddenly. She glanced at his face. It was impassive; it showed no sign of any emotion at all.

'Well? What is this heiress to me? Can I get her diamonds?'

'I want you to become her friend, Anastasia. I desire this favour very greatly.'

The Lady Anastasia stopped suddenly. She lowered her face; her cheek flushed; her lip trembled. 'Ludovick,' she said, 'I am a woman after all. You may command me in anything—anything else. But not in this. If you insist upon this, I will go home at once.'

He looked surprised. 'Why?' he began. 'Surely my Anastasia is not jealous—not jealous, after all the proofs that I have given her of fidelity?'

'Jealous!' she repeated. 'What have you to do with the girl, then?'

'My dear mistress, I care nothing about the girl, or about any woman in the world, except one. Who should know this except the one herself? It is the girl's fortune that I want—not the girl herself.'

'How will you get it without the girl?'

'That is the very point I am considering. I came here in order to get this fortune. My secretary—the fellow Semple—told me of the girl. I sent you here in order to help me to secure this fortune. I sent his Reverence here—the Colonel—Sir Harry—all of them—here with the same object, which they must not know. I came here. I made a friend of the girl's guardian.'

'If this is true——'

'Of course it is true,' he replied coldly. 'Let me go on. You shall not charge me again with want of confidence. The guardian is a simple old sailor. He is a fool, of course, being a sailor. He thinks to marry his ward to a man of rank.'

'Yourself, perhaps?'

'Perhaps. He also believes in the virtue and piety which my friends here have ascribed to me.'

'How will you get the fortune without the girl?'

'I tell you again—there is the difficulty. Anastasia, if you have ever promised to assist me, give me your assist-

ance now. I must win the confidence of the old man and the girl. Everybody must speak well of me. I will learn how the money is placed and where. I will get possession of it somehow.'

'And then—when you have it?'

'My difficulties will be at an end. I shall leave the town and the gaming table and everything. You will come with me, Anastasia.' This time he took her hand. 'We will be Alexis and Amaryllis, the shepherd Strephon and the maiden Daphne. My Anastasia, believe me, I am tired of the world and its noisy pleasures. I sigh for rest and repose.'

'And the girl?'

'She will do better without this huge fortune. Ye gods! to give such a girl—this sailor wench—this red and pink bourgeoise—the fortune that should have been yours, Anastasia! 'Tis monstrous! It cuts her off from her own people. She would do better to marry the young sailor fellow who stumbled and rolled through the minuet with her, thinking he was on his deck rolling in the Bay of Biscay. I will set this matter right. I will relieve her of her fortune and throw her into those arms which reek of pitch and tar and rope. Happy girl!'

The Lady Anastasia sighed. 'There will never be any rest—or any repose—or any happiness for you or for me. Have it your own way. I will make the girl my friend. I will tell her that you are the best of men and the most virtuous. Yes,' she laughed a little, but not mirthfully, 'the most virtuous. And now, I think, you may walk with me through their narrow lanes with a bridge and a stream for every one, to the small and dirty cabin where my maid makes shift to dress me every day, so that I may turn out decent at least.'

CHAPTER XVII

'IN THE LISBON TRADE'

I was greatly surprised, being on duty aboard in the forenoon, to see Lord Fylingdale on our quay, which adjoins the Common Stath, in company with Captain Crowle.

In truth, the nobleman looked out of his element—a fish on dry land—in a place of trade. His dress was by no means suitable for the collection of bales and casks and crates with which the quay was piled, nor did his look resemble that of the merchant, who may be full of dignity, as he is full of responsibility, but is never cold and haughty. His secret purpose, as I afterwards understood, was to ascertain the true nature of Molly's fortune, which he could not believe to be so great as had been represented to him. His professed purpose was to see what Captain Crowle was anxious to show him. The good old man, in fact, played the very game which this virtuous gentleman desired; he threw the girl—money, and lands, and ships, and all—at the feet of the very man who wanted the fortune, and for the sake of it would not scruple to bring misery upon the girl.

'I have heard,' his Lordship was saying, as he looked around and marked the crowd of porters, lightermen, and clerks running about, 'of ships and shipping. There is a place near London, I believe, where they have ships. But

I have never seen that part of town. My own friends own farms, not ships.'

'Ships may be better than farms,' the old sailor replied stoutly. 'You have frosts in May; hail in August; drought in spring—where are your farms then?'

Lord Fylingdale laughed pleasantly.

'Nay, Captain, but there is another side to your picture also. Storms arise; the waves become billows; there are hidden rocks—where are your ships then?'

'The underwriters pay for all. There may be better money, I say, in ships than in land.'

'Then the merchants should be richer than the landowners.'

'Not always, by your leave, my Lord. For there are too many merchants; and of landowners, such as your Lordship, there are never more than a few. But some merchants are richer than some landowners. Of these my ward is one.'

'I should like to know, Captain, what you mean by rich. Your ward owns ships, which bring home their cargoes—turpentine and tar—a fragrant trade.'

'The farmer's muck-heap smells no sweeter, and pigsties, my Lord, are no ladies' bowers.'

'Show me one of your ships, Captain. If you have one in port, take me on board. Make me understand what this trade means. I doubt not that before long we shall all turn our ploughs into rudders, our maypoles into masts, and our oaks into ships, and so go a-trading up and down the seas, and get rich like the merchants of Lynn Regis.'

I do not know how far he spoke truthfully; I am, on the whole, inclined to believe that he was actually ignorant of trade and shipping of any kind. He and his class build up a wall between themselves and those who carry

on the trade which pours wealth into the country and push out their fleets into far-distant seas; and he and his class imagine that they are a superior race to whom Providence hath delivered the work of administering the kingdom, with all the offices, prizes, places, and honours belonging to that work. They will not admit the merchants to any share; they fill the House of Commons —which should be an assembly containing the merchants, and all who make the country rich—with placemen (their servants), and their own cousins, sons, and brothers. They command our armies and our navies; they are our judges and our magistrates; for them the poet writes, the player acts, the artist paints. They do not condescend to penetrate into the ports where the ships lie moored and the quays which contain the treasures brought home and the treasures sent out. They grow continually poorer instead of richer; their gambling, their troops of servants, their drinking, their pleasant vices, impoverish them; they sell their woods and pawn their revenues. All this time the merchants are growing richer; they live in places where they never see anything of the fashionable world—in villages outside London; in towns like Bristol, Lynn, Southampton, Newcastle, where there are no noble lords; they do not concern themselves about the Government if only the seas are kept open.

Again, if these noblemen meet the merchants on any occasion their carriage is cold and proud. Perhaps they show an open scorn of trade; in any case, they treat them with scanty consideration, as people who have no rank. Even when they desire to conciliate these inferiors, their manner is haughty, and they speak from a height.

One man is not better than another because he makes his living out of fields while this other makes his out of ships. And I do not find that one man makes a better

sailor than another because he is the son of a gentleman while the other is the son of a boat-builder or a rope-maker.

However, I am talking likely enough as a fool. It is not for me to question the order of the world. If the merchants go on getting richer they may, some time or other, look down upon the House of Lords as much as the House of Lords, with their ladies, their sons, their daughters, their nephews, and their cousins, now look down upon merchants and all who earn their livelihood by honest work, and by enterprises which demand courage and resolution, knowledge, patience, and skill.

Presently I saw them both get into a dinghy, which the Captain rowed out into the river, making for the *Lady of Lynn*. He made fast the painter to the companion and climbed up the rope ladder, followed by his Lordship, who, with some difficulty, landed on the deck, looking at his tarred hands with curiosity rather than disgust. I must say that he made no complaint, even though his dress, which was not adapted for rope ladders, showed also signs of the tar.

'My Lord,' said the Captain, 'this is one of my ward's ships, and there is the mate of the ship, Mr. Pentecrosse, at your service.'

'At your service, sir,' said my Lord, from his superior height, and with that cold condescension which I should try in vain to imitate and cannot attempt to set down in words. It is not the voice of authority—every skipper knows what that is and every sailor. It is a manner which is never found except among people of rank. However, I pulled off my hat and bowed low. His Lordship took no further notice of me for awhile, but looked about him curiously.

'A strange place,' he said. 'I have never before been on a ship. Tell me more about this ship, Captain.'

'She is called the *Lady of Lynn*. She is 380 tons burden, and she is in the Lisbon trade.'

'In the Lisbon trade? Captain, neither the amount of her tons nor the nature of her occupation enlightens me in the least.'

'She sails from here to Lisbon and back again. She takes out for the Portuguese things that they want—iron, lead, instruments of all kinds, wool, and a great many other things—and she brings back what we want—the wine of the country. She comes laden with port wine, Sack, Malmsey, Canary, Teneriffe, Lisbon, Bucellas, Mountain—in a word, all the wine of Spain and Portugal. My ward is an export and import merchant as well as a shipowner; she fills her ships with wine. The country round Lynn is a thirsty country; the gentlemen of Norfolk, Lincoln and the Fen countries, not to speak of the University of Cambridge, all drink the wine of Spain and Portugal, and a great deal of it. We send our wine in barges up the river and in waggons across the country; we send our wine to Newcastle and Hull by ships. The trade of Lynn Regis in Spanish and Portuguese wine is very considerable, and most of it is in the hands of my ward.'

'This is the Lisbon trade. I begin to understand. And what may such a ship as this be worth?'

'To build her, to rig her, to fit her for sea, to provision her, would cost a matter of £1,500 or £2,000.'

'And I suppose she earns something by her voyages?'

The Captain smiled.

'She makes two voyages every year; sometimes five in two years. She must first pay her captain and the ship's company; then she must pay for repairs—a woman and a ship, they say, are always wanting repairs—then she must pay for provisions for the crew; there are customs

dues and harbour dues at both ends. When all is paid the ship will bring to her owners a profit of £500 or £600. It is a bad year when she does not bring in £600.'

His Lordship's eyebrows lifted. 'How many ships did you say are owned by this fortunate young lady?'

'She has eight. They are not all in the Lisbon trade. Some sail to Norway; some to the Baltic—that is, to Revel and Dantzig—and bring home what you saw on the quay, the turpentine, deal, skins, fur, and so forth.'

'Eight ships and a bad year when every single ship does not bring in a profit of £600. Then, Captain Crowle, we may take it that your ward has an income of £4,800 a year.'

The Captain smiled again. 'If it were only that I should not be so anxious about her future. But consider, my Lord. For eighteen years she has lived with me—she and her mother—we live in a plain and homely way, according to our station. We are respectable, but not gentlefolk. We live on about £150 a year. The rest is money saved. Some of it is laid out in land. My ward has a good bit of land, here and there, chiefly in Marshland, which is fat and fertile; some of it is laid out in houses—a good part of Lynn belongs to her—some of it is lent on mortgage. Since your Lordship hath kindly promised to give me your advice on the matter, it is proper to tell you the truth. The girl, therefore, will have an income of over £12,000 a year.'

A strange and sudden flush rose to his Lordship's cheek; for a few moments he did not reply. Then in a harsh and constrained voice he said: 'It is a very large income, Captain. Many members of the Upper House have much less. You must be very careful. At six per cent. it is actually £200,000 or thereabouts. You must be very careful.'

'I have been, and shall be, very careful. With such a fortune, my Lord, may not my girl look high?'

'She may look very high. There are some families which would not admit, even for so great a fortune, a *mésalliance*, but they are few. There are the jewels, too, of which she wore so many last night. What may they be worth?'

'I do not know. They have been lying in a chest for fifty years and more. They were brought from India by Molly's grandfather, who sailed there, and made the acquaintance of an Indian prince, to whom he rendered some service. They were too grand for him and his wife; and they were too grand for Molly's mother, who is but a homely body. Therefore they have been locked up all this time. Nobody has ever worn them until Molly put them on last night.'

'I am a poor judge of such things, but, Captain, I believe that what the lady wore last night must be worth a very large sum—a very large sum indeed.'

'It may be so. It may be so,' said the Captain. 'There are as many in the box as we took out of it. Well, my Lord, will her diamonds add to her attractions?'

'Captain Crowle, no one knows or can understand the extraordinary beauty of a woman who is worth £200,000, and has, besides, diamonds and pearls fit for a Duchess. You must, indeed, be very careful.'

I, who stood beside him humbly, hat in hand, wondered within myself as to what his Lordship would say if the Captain should suddenly or inadvertently reveal his secret ambitions. Indeed, he looked so commanding and so noble that these ambitions appeared to me ridiculous. I felt happier in thinking that they were ridiculous.

How, indeed, should our girl, who must appear homely to one who knew courts and the charms and splendour

of great ladies, attract this cold and fastidious nobleman?

He turned suddenly upon me. 'This,' he said, 'is one of your crew?'

I was dressed in my workaday frieze and shag, and looked, I dare say, to unpractised eyes, more like a foc'sle hand than the chief officer.

'It is our mate. I told your Lordship before. He is second in command.'

'Oh! sir,' he said, bowing, a gesture which politeness demanded and difference of rank allowed to be a slight inclination only, 'I beg your pardon. The strangeness of this place made me forget. Stay, is not this the—the gentleman who attempted a minuet last night with the fair Miss Molly?'

The question threw me into confusion. The Captain answered for me.

'Gad! He did it rarely.'

'Rarely, indeed. Well, sir you are lucky. You dance with the lady; you are in the service of the lady; by faithful service you help to make her rich. What greater marks of favour can Providence bestow upon you?'

I made no answer, because, indeed, I knew not what to reply.

'And now, sir, if you will show me your ship, I shall be obliged to you. Teach me the economy of a merchantman.'

I obeyed. We left the Captain on deck, and I took him over the whole of the ship. He wanted to see everything; he inspected the two carronades on the quarter-deck and the stand of small arms. I showed him the binnacle and explained how we steered and kept her in her course. I took him below and showed him the lower deck, and let him peer into the hold. He saw the galley and the foc'sle, and everything.

I observed that he was extremely curious about all he saw. He wanted to know the value of things; the wages; the cost of provisioning the ship; the purchase and the sale of the cargo. It was wonderful to find a man of his rank so curious as to every point.

'I suppose,' he said, 'that the old man states the mere facts as to these ships—and the lands—and—and the rest of it.'

'No man knows better than the Captain,' I replied. 'He has worked for nearly twenty years for his ward.'

'And for himself as well, I doubt not.'

'No, my Lord, not for himself. All for his ward. He has taken nothing for himself, though he might have done so. It has been all for his ward.'

'A virtuous guardian, truly. Young man, he should be an example to you. Would that there were many guardians so prudent and so careful!'

Then I invited him into the cabin, and showed him how the log is kept, and the ship's course set down day by day. There was nothing which he did not wish to understand.

'I never knew before,' he said, 'that ships could mean money. Pray, Captain Crowle, could a ship, such as this, be sold and converted into ready money like a forest of oak or a plantation of cedars, or an estate of land?'

'Assuredly, my Lord. If I put up the *Lady of Lynn* for sale to-morrow there would be a score of bids for her here in this town. If I sold her in London she would command a higher price.'

'Your ward could, therefore, sell her whole fleet if she chose.'

'Her fleet and her business as a merchant, and her lands and her houses and her jewels—she could sell them all.'

It seems trifling to set down this conversation, but you will understand in due course the meaning of these

questions, and what was in the mind—the corrupt and evil mind—of this deceiver.

'But,' he went on, 'the ship may be cast away.'

'Ay! She may be cast away. Then this lad and the whole of the ship's crew would be drowned. That happens to many tall ships. We sailors take our chance.'

'The crew might be drowned. I was thinking, however, of the cargo and the ship.'

'Oh! as to them, the underwriters would pay. Underwriters, my Lord, are a class of people who, between them, take the risk of ships for a percentage.'

'Then, under no circumstances, not even that of shipwreck, or of fire, or of pirates, can the owner lose.'

'The underwriters would pay. But look you, my Lord, there are risks in every kind of business. There is the cargo. The owner of this ship is also a merchant. She loads a cargo of wine on her own ship; unloads it on her own quay, and sends it about the country to the innkeepers and the merchants of the towns. They may not want her wine—but they always do. They may not be willing to pay so much as usual, but they generally do. These are our risks. But it is a safe business on the whole—eh, Jack?'

'We have never lost much yet, to my knowledge, Captain.'

Lord Fylingdale sat down carelessly on the cabin table, dangling his leg.

'I have had a most instructive visit, Captain. I do not mind the tar on my hands or that on my small clothes, which are ruined. I have learned a great deal. Captain,' he added solemnly, 'Miss Molly has, beside the charms of her person and her conversation—out of so fine a mouth pearls only, pearls as fine as those around her neck, would drop—twelve thousand charms a year. I do not know

her equal in London at this moment. The daughter of a retired tallow-chandler was spoken of, some time ago—said to have fifty thousand pounds—with a squint. No, Sir, Miss Molly in London would take the town by storm.'

He paused and fell into a short meditation.

'Jack,' said the Captain, 'there is, I am sure, a bottle in the locker. His Lordship must not leave the ship without tasting some of the cargo.'

I produced a bottle and glasses.

'Your very best, Jack?'

'The King himself has no better,' I replied stoutly, 'because no better wine is made.'

'I give you a toast, Captain,' said his Lordship. 'The fair Miss Molly!'

We drank it with enthusiasm.

'I have this morning learned a great deal. For one who, like myself, proposes to serve his country, all kinds of knowledge are useful—even the smallest details may be important. I have a good memory, and I shall not readily forget the things which you have taught me. We of the Upper House, perhaps, keep too much aloof from the trading interests of the country.'

'Your Lordship,' said the Captain, 'should present an example of the better way.'

'I shall endeavour to do so.' He put on his hat and stood up. 'Before leaving the ship, Mr. Pentecrosse—you seem to have an honest face—I would exhort you to persevere in faithful service and to deserve the confidence of your employer. I wish you, sir, a successful voyage and many of them.' He took a step toward the cabin door, but stopped and turned again to me. 'Mr. Pentecrosse, let me add another word of advice. Do not again attempt to enact the part of a fine gentleman. Believe me, sir, the part requires practice and study, unless one is born and

brought up a gentleman. Stick to your quarter-deck, friend, and to your ship's log, and leave, for the future, minuets, heiresses, and polite Assemblies to your betters.'

So saying, he walked out of the cabin and climbed down the ladder, followed by the Captain. As for me, I stood gaping at the open door, looking, as they say, like a stuck pig, being both ashamed and angry.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE WITCH

All that day I remained in a state of gloom. I was ashamed to think that I had brought ridicule upon Molly by my clumsy dancing, and I was gloomy because I understood that Molly must certainly marry some great man, and that there would be an end of her so far as I was concerned. I was her servant; I was her faithful servant; what could I want more? I was never again to attempt the part of a fine gentleman—and she would live wholly among fine gentlemen. I know now that it was more than the common gloom of humiliation. That I should have thrown off with ease. It was the terror of something evil—the consciousness which seizes the soul without any cause that can be ascertained, and fills it with trembling and with terror. Certain words—harmless words—kept recurring to my mind; words uttered by Lord Fylingdale—'Can a ship be sold like a farm?' or words to that effect. Why did these simple words disturb me? The Captain had no thought of selling any of the ships. And why, when I thought of these words, did I also remember the curious change that came over his face when he understood the great wealth of this young heiress? I seemed to see again the strange flush of his pale, cold cheek; I seemed to see a strange smile upon his unbending lips and a strange light in his eyes. There was never, surely, any gentleman

with a face so cold and calm as that of my Lord Fylingdale. It was as if a perpetual peace reigned in his mind; as if he was disturbed by none of the passions and emotions of ordinary men. Therefore the smile and the strange look must have been in my imagination only.

Was it possible that the Captain's secret prayers were to be granted? They were ambitious prayers. I have heard it said that the Lord sometimes grants to men the thing they most desire in order that they may learn how much better it would have been for them had their prayers been refused. You shall learn how this lesson was driven into my mind—line upon line—precept upon precept. For my own part, while I honestly desired for Molly the best of husbands, the thought of her marrying this cold, stately, proud young nobleman filled me with pity.

And I must tell you, moreover, of a strange thing. It happened some three or four years before these events, but I have never forgotten it.

It is connected with Molly's black woman, whom we called Nigra. Like all black women, she was esteemed a witch. In earlier times she would have been burned at the stake for her magic and sorcery. Yet she was only a white witch, as they call them; it was very well known that she worked no mischief and cast no spells. Nobody was afraid of her. If a child fell into fits, the mother, so far from thinking Nigra to be the cause, brought her to the black woman to be cured. Nobody could look at her kindly, wrinkled old face, which was always smiling through her white teeth; nobody could see those smiles upon her face, which shone in the sun as if it was of burnished metal; nobody could talk with her, I say, and believe that she was of the malignant stuff that makes the witch of the village. She had a great reputation for telling fortunes; she could show girls their future husbands; she could find out lucky days for

them and tell them how to avoid unlucky days; she could make charms to be hung round the necks of infants which would keep them from croup, fits and convulsions, and carry them safely through measles and whooping-cough. She had sovereign remedies against toothache, chilblains, earache, growing pains, agues, fevers, and all the diseases of boys and girls, and could deal with the ailments which fall upon the maids, such as megrims, headache, swoonings, giddiness, vapours, and melancholy. It was believed that even Dr. Worship himself could not compare with this black woman from the Guinea Coast.

One evening, long before the events that I am relating, I surprised her while she was engaged in her harmless spells and magic rites. It was in the kitchen, where she sat alone at a table before the fire. There was no candle, and the red light of the blazing coal made her face shine like copper and her eyes like two flames, and transformed her red cloth turban into rich crimson velvet. She had on the table before her a string of shells, a monkey's skull—but it looked like the skull of a baby—a thick round stick, painted with lines of red and blue, two or three rags of cloth, a cocoanut shell cut in two to make a cup, and many other tools or instruments which I forget; and, indeed, it matters nothing, because no one would be any the wiser if I set down the whole furniture of this old sorceress.

She was bending over the table, arranging in some kind of order these mysterious means for learning the future, and murmuring the while gibberish of the kind which serves these poor blacks for their language. She was so busy that she did not hear my footsteps, till I stole behind her and clapped both my hands over her eyes.

Then she jumped up with a shriek, letting her magical tools drop, and turned round. 'Shoo!' she cried, bursting into a laugh. 'Shoo! It's Massa Jack. I tought it

was de debble come to look on.' This was the way she talked. I believe that if you take a negro as a baby and bring him up with Christians, so that he hears no word of his own gibberish, in the end he will always speak in this way. It is part of his nature; it is one of the things which belong to his race—wool instead of hair; black skin instead of white; thick speech instead of clear; the shin rounded instead of the calf; a projecting heel, and a big jaw with white, strong teeth.

'Does the devil often come here, Nigra?'

'Massa Jack,' she replied, with as much solemnity as she could command, 'don't you nebber ask if the debble comes here.'

'What is he like, Nigra?'

She sat down and began to laugh. She laughed till her mouth nearly reached her ears; she laughed till her turban nodded and shook, and her shoulders shook, and she shook all over. She laughed, I know not why. 'What he like? Ho! Ho! Ho! Massa Jack—what he like?

'Well, but, Nigra, tell me how you know him when you see him.'

'Massa Jack,' she became serious as suddenly as she had fallen into her fit of laughter, 'look ye here. When you see de debble—then you know de debble.'

So saying, she turned to the table again and began to gather up her unholy possessions.

'Well, but, Nigra, I am not the devil, and so you may as well tell me whose fortune you are telling.'

'Missy's fortune.'

'What is it?'

She shook her head. 'Can't tell you, Massa Jack. Mustn't tell you.'

'Why not? Come, Nigra, you know that I desire the very best fortune for her that can be given to anyone.'

She hesitated. Then she laid her hand on mine. 'Massa Jack,' she said, 'I tell her fortune your people's way, by the cards, and my people's way, by the gri-gri and the skull. It's always the same fortune.'

'What is it?'

'Always the same. They say—trouble for Missy—great big trouble—she dunno yet what trouble is. Bimeby she find out, and then all de trouble go—like as if de sun come out and de rain leave off. All the same fortune.'

'I don't understand it at all, Nigra. Why should trouble come to Miss Molly?'

'Cards don' tell that. Sometimes, Jack, de head'—she laid her hand on the skull of the monkey, or was it the skull of a child?—'de head tells me things. Befo' you come in de head was talking fine. He say, "Lose to gain—lose to gain. Him no good. Bimeby bery fine man come along." Dat's what de head said to-night.'

'Nonsense, Nigra—a fleshless skull cannot speak.'

'Dat's what de head say to me dis night,' she replied doggedly.

I looked at the skull, but it remained silent, grinning with the dreadful mockery of the death's head.

'Bimeby bery fine man come along,' Nigra repeated.

I laughed incredulous. Then she laid her hand upon my eyes for a moment—only for a moment. 'Listen, then.'

It was like a voice far away. I opened my eyes again. Before me sat, or stood unsupported, the skull, and nothing else. The room had vanished, Nigra and her tools and everything. The eyes of the skull were filled with a bright light, and the teeth moved, and the thing spoke. It said: 'Lose to gain! Lose to gain! By-and-by a better man will come.'

I shivered and shook. I shut my eyes for the brightness of the light. I opened them again immediately. Every-

thing was as before : the old black woman beside me at the table ; the skull and the rest of the things ; the red light of the fire.

'Nigra,' I cried, 'what have you done? You are a witch.'

'What did de skull say, Massa Jack?'

'How did you do it? What does it mean?' To this day I know not how she contrived this witchcraft.

She would talk no more, however. I suppose she read the signs and tokens according to the rules of her witchcraft, and knew no more. I am not one of those who believe that these black women can penetrate the clouds of the future and can foresee, that is, see clearly, before they happen, the things that are coming. It would be too much to expect of a mere black. Why should Providence, who has manifestly created the black man to be the slave of the white, confer upon the black woman so great a gift as that of prophecy? It is not credible.

All that day, after Lord Fylingdale climbed down by the rope ladder, I kept hearing over again the words of the black woman, which came back to me, though I had long forgotten them, 'By-and-by. By-and-by, a better man will come.'

Some there are who laugh at these things, which they call superstitions. I have heard my father and the vicar arguing learnedly that the time for witchcraft has passed away, with that of miracles, demoniac possessions, and the casting out of devils. Well, it is not for me to speak of things that belong to the landsman. There may be no such thing as witchcraft ; there may be no overlooking ; the moon and the planets cannot, perhaps, strike children. But as for what the sailor believes—why, he *knows*. All the Greek and all the Hebrew in the world will not shake out of his mind what he knows. He learns new knowledge

with every voyage, and new experience with every gale, and when those words of poor old Nigra came back to me, and would not leave me, keeping up a continual sing-song in my head, I knew very well indeed that some trouble was brewing—and that the trouble had to do with Molly.

CHAPTER XIX

A TRUE FRIEND

When Molly came out of church after morning prayers she stood in the porch to see the company pass out. It was a fashionable company, consisting entirely of ladies who came from the Pump Room to hear the Reverend Benjamin Purdon, *locum tenens* for the Curate of St. Nicholas, read the prayers of the morning service. This he did with an impressiveness quite overwhelming, having a deep and musical voice, which he would roll up and down like the swelling notes of an organ, insomuch that some ladies wept every morning, while he pronounced the Absolution with so much weight that every sinner present rose from her knees in the comfortable faith that her sins were absolved and washed away, and that she could now begin a new series of sins upon a clean slate. Happy condition, when, without penance, which the Papists enforce; and without repentance, which is demanded by the Protestant faith, a sinner can every morning wipe off the sins of the last twenty-four hours and so begin another day with a robe as white as snow, no sins upon his conscience, and a sure and certain hope. 'Let us accept,' said this reverend divine, 'with gratitude and joy all that Holy Church gives us; above all, her absolution. We have not the sins of yesterday to weigh us down together with the sins of to-day. Madam, your silk apron becomes you

highly; pink silk with silver matches the colour of your cheeks. It is the colour of Venus herself, I vow. Ah! there are moments when I could wish I was not an ecclesiastic!'

As a rule the morning prayers at our two churches are but poorly attended. The merchants and the captains are at this hour in the counting-houses on the Quay, or assembled at the Custom House, which is a kind of exchange for them; the craftsmen and the sailors and the bargemen are at their work; the shopkeepers are standing behind their counters; the housewives and the girls are in the kitchen, pantry, or still-room; there is no one left to attend the morning service, except a few bedesmen and poor old women.

But in the company assembled at the Spa there were many ladies of pious disposition, though of fashionable conversation, who, having no duties to perform, after drinking the waters and exchanging the latest gossip at the Pump Room, were pleased to attend the daily prayers —all the more because they were read by a clergyman from London who could talk, when he pleased, like a mere man of the world, or, also when he pleased, with the gravity and the piety of a bishop. The church was, further, a place where one could gather together, so to speak, all the ladies' dresses and receive suggestions and hints by the example of others what to choose and what to avoid.

Among those who came out of the church that morning was the Lady Anastasia, in a long hood lined with blue silk, looking, as she always did, more distinguished than any of the rest. She stopped in the porch, seeing Molly, and laughed, tapping her on the cheek with her fan. The other ladies, recognising the girl who wore the chains and the strings of jewels with so fine a dress at the Assembly,

passed on their way, sticking out their chins, or sniffing slightly, or giggling and whispering, or even frowning. These gestures all meant the same thing: scorn and contempt for the girl who presumed, not being a gentlewoman, to have so much money and so much beauty. Envy, no doubt, was more in their minds than scorn. They were agreed, without speaking, to treat the poor girl with every sign of resentment. And then, to their confusion, the greatest lady among them stopped and laughed and patted the impudent baggage on the cheek!

'Child,' said the Lady Anastasia, 'you were at the Assembly the other night. I saw you dancing a minuet, and I heard that you were rudely treated at the country dance. I have heard Lord Fylingdale speak about you. He has made the acquaintance of your guardian, Captain Crawle or Crowle. Come, child. Let us be better acquainted. Where are you going?'

'I am going home, madam.'

'Take me with you, then. Let me see your home.'

Molly blushed to the ears and stammered that it was too great honour. So she walked away, Lady Anastasia with her, while the ladies stood in little groups watching in wonder and indignation, through the churchyard and so to the Captain's house in Hogman's Lane, close to the fields and gardens.

Molly led her noble guest into the parlour. The Lady Anastasia looked round. 'So,' she said, 'this is the home of the heiress.' There was truly very little to indicate this fact. The floor was clean and sanded; a few chairs stood round the walls; one of them was an armchair; on the walls hung certain portraits—for my own part I always considered these as very fine works of art, but I have since heard that the limner was but a sorry member of the craft. He was an itinerant painter, who drew these portraits in

oils at half a guinea each. They represented Molly's parents and Captain Crowle as a young man. On the mantelshelf stood a row of china cups, and over them a dozen samplers. There was a table and there was no other furniture.

'You are an heiress, are you not, child?'

'The Captain tells me so, madam.'

'The Captain's views as to the nature of a fortune may be limited. What is your fortune?'

'There are ships, and lands, and houses. I know not how many of each. And I believe there is money, but I know not how much.'

'Strange! Is it in such a house that an heiress should be brought up? Have you servants of your own?'

'I have my black woman, Nigra.'

'Humph! Have you a coach? or a chair? or a harpsichord?'

'I have none of these things.'

'Have you friends among the gentlefolk? Who are the people that you visit?'

'There are no gentlefolk in Lynn. I know the Vicar and the Curate of St. Nicholas and their families, and the schoolmaster and his son.'

'And the parish clerk, I suppose; and the man who plays the organ. Have you been educated?'

Molly blushed. 'The Captain says that I have had the best education possible for a woman. I can read and write and cast up accounts; and I can make cakes and puddings, and brew the beer and make the cordials; and I can embroider and sew.'

'Heavens! What a preparation for an heiress! But, perhaps, it is not so great a fortune after all. And do you go about daily dressed like this—in stuff or linsey-woolsey?'

'It is my work-a-day dress. I have a better for Sunday.'

'I dare say—I dare say. What do they call you? Molly? It is a good name for you. Molly. There is something simple about it—something rustical, yet not uncouth, like Blousabella. Your face will pass, Molly. It is a fair garden of red and white. Your eyes are good; they can be soft and affectionate. I should think they could also be hard and unforgiving. Your hair is delightful; even the tresses of Amaryllis are coarse and thick compared with yours. Your hand, my dear, is a soft and warm hand, but it is too red—you work with it.'

'Why, what else should I work with?'

'The only work you should do is the shuffling and the dealing of cards—your hands were made for this purpose—or to handle a fan, or to wear gloves; but not to work, believe me.'

Molly looked at her hand. It was a workwoman's hand, being, though small, thick and strong, with fingers square rather than long. She looked and laughed.

'What would you say, madam, if you saw me rowing a boat or handling the sail while Jack Pentecrosse steers? I have done much rougher work in a boat than in the still-room.'

'These confessions amaze me, my dear. With ships—actually the plural of the word ship!—and lands—what lands?—and houses, and that sum of money, that you should live in a house like this, without servants, without dress—your clothes are not dress—without a coach—and that you should be allowed . . . Pray, Molly, what does your mother think of it?'

'My mother teaches me to do what she herself does.'

'Yet you came the other night in a costly dress, and you danced the minuet.'

'The Director of the Ceremonies, Mr. Prappet, taught me the dance.'

'You acquitted yourself tolerably, considering your partner, who made everybody laugh. There was, however, too much of the dancing school in your style. A minuet, child, should convey the idea of gesture unstudied. Not natural. Heaven forbid that the world of fashion should ever be natural! No, but springing out of the courtesy of the situation, in accordance with the practice of the polite world. The cavalier woos the maiden, not in the country fashion of swain and shepherdess, whose wooing is a plain and direct question with a plain and direct answer, but with formal advances according to well-understood rules, which demand certain postures and gestures. Who dressed you?'

'The dressmaker from Norwich who has a shop in Mercers' Row. She had the dress from London.'

'The dress was passable. For most girls it would have been too costly. But it proclaimed the heiress. It also awakened the envy, hatred, and malice of the whole Assembly—I mean of the ladies. Then there were the jewels. Child, are you really possessed of all those jewels? Are they truly your own? Are they truly real?'

'I suppose so. They have been locked up for fifty years. My grandfather, who was a ship's captain, brought them from India. They were given to him in return for some service by a native prince. No one has ever worn them except myself. The Captain wanted to make the whole world understand that I have these fine things. That is why I took some of them out and put them on.'

'The world received this intelligence, child, with envy unspeakable. Since the Assembly the ladies have been entirely occupied in taking away your character. You are a strolling actress; your jewels are coloured glass;

your silk dress is a stage costume; I will not repeat the many kind things said concerning you.'

'Oh! But what have I done? What am I to do?

'Be not alarmed. Everybody's character is taken away in turns, and nobody is one whit the worse. With a girl like you, so innocent of the world, the more your character is taken away the better it becomes.'

'Yet I would rather——'

'Tut, tut! What matters their talk? But about those jewels, my dear. I am curious about them. Will you let me see them all? If only you knew how jewels carry me away!'

Molly went away, and presently returned with a large casket of wood carved with all kinds of devices, such as figures, flowers, fruit, and leaves. Within there were trays lined with red velvet, the colour now somewhat decayed; on these trays reposed the jewels she had worn, and many more. There were strings of pearls; coils of gold chains; bracelets and necklaces; rings, brooches; all kinds imaginable, set with precious stones, diamonds, emeralds, pearls, rubies, turquoise, sapphires, opals—every jewel that is known to men and prized by women.

The Lady Anastasia gazed upon them with hunger and longing; she took up the chains and strings of pearls and rubies and suffered them to fall gently through her fingers, as if the mere touch was sovereign against all ills; she sighed as she laid them down. She sprang to her feet and began to hang them about Molly's neck and arms; she twisted the pearls in and about her hair; she strung the gold chains about her neck; she covered her again, as she had been covered at the Assembly, with the glittering gauds.

'Oh!' she cried, sinking into her chair. 'Tis too much! Take them off again. Molly, I burst—I faint—

I die—with envy. Oh! that you, who care so little for them, should have so many, and I, who care so much, should have so few. Women have risked their honour, their name, their immortal souls, for a tenth part of the treasures that you have in this casket. And yet you wonder why they take away your character!'

Molly laughed and shut the box. 'As I never saw them before yesterday I do not understand their envy.'

'No—you do not understand. Ah! how much happiness you lose in not understanding. For you know not the joy of seeing all faces grow black and all looks bitter. Well, put them away, out of my sight.'

Then she turned to another subject.

'Tell me, Molly, what your guardian designs for you. Are you to marry some merchant who distributes casks of turpentine about the country? Or a sailor who pretends to be a fine gentleman and dances like an elephant? The handling of this noble fortune is surely above the ambition of such gentry as these.'

'Indeed I do not know. The Captain says that he must look higher than a merchant or a sailor of Lynn. And he will not think of any gentleman of the country, neither, because they are all hard drinkers.'

'The Captain is difficult to please. Methinks a gentleman would at least bestow promotion. Your children would be gentlefolk, I dare say, with the help of this great fortune. What does he want, however?'

'He talks about finding a young man of position, who is also virtuous.'

'Oh! He is indeed ambitious. My dear, a young man of position who wants a fortune is easily found. He grows and flourishes in the park, like blackberries on a hedge. But when you speak of virtue, the virtuous young man is not so common. 'Tis a wicked world, my dear.'

'The Captain has spoken on the subject to Lord Fylingdale.'

'I believe he has done so. He may, indeed, entirely depend upon his Lordship's advice, whether it concerns the placing of your fortune or the bestowal of your hand.'

'The Captain, I know, thinks very highly of Lord Fylingdale's judgment.'

'I hope also of his virtue. Indeed, but for his virtue, his Lordship would be even as other men, which would be a pity for other men—I mean, for him.'

She then began to give Molly advice about her next appearance at the Assembly.

'You must come again; you must come often; I will take care that you find partners. You must not show that you are moved in the least by the treatment you have received. But I would advise a more simple dress. Come to me, my dear, and my maid shall dress you. A young girl like yourself ought not to wear so much silk and lace, and the addition of the gold network was more fitting for a matron of rank than a young unmarried woman. And as for the jewels, I would recommend one gold chain or a necklace of pearls and a bracelet or two—I saw one with sapphires, very becoming—and do not put the diamonds in your hair. And you must on no account come with the bear who flopped and sprawled with you before.'

'Poor Jack!'

'Jack? Is he your brother?'

'No. He is my old friend. And he is mate on one of my ships—the *Lady of Lynn*.'

'I dare say he would like to command the other Lady of Lynn. But, Molly, pray be careful. A Jack-in-the-box is apt to jump up high. Take care.'

So saying she rose to go, but stopped for a few last words.

'Well, my dear, you must seriously prepare yourself to take the place that belongs to you by right of your fortune. After all, what is rank compared with wealth? I have no doubt that some sprig of quality will be found to take your hand—with your fortune. At first the women will flout you. Keep up your courage. You can buy their kindness; you can buy it by judicious gifts, or by finding out their secrets. I will help you there, my dear. I know secrets enough to crack the reputation of half the town.'

Molly shuddered. 'You make me afraid,' she said. 'Am I never to have friends?'

The Lady Anastasia shook her head. 'Friends, my dear? What does the girl mean? We are all friends; of course we are friends, and we all backbite each other and carry scandal and intrigue. Friends, my dear? In the world of fashion?'

'I shall never like the world of fashion.'

'Not at first. But the liking will come. There is no other way of life that can be compared with it. You will rise at noon after a cup of chocolate; you will spend the afternoon in dressing; you will go out in your coach or your chair to breathe the air of the park; you will take dinner at four; you will go to the theatre or the opera at six; you will sit down to cards at ten. My simple native, you know not half the joys that await you in the dear, delightful, scandalous town.'

So she went on, and before she departed she had made Molly promise to visit her and to receive a continuation of those lessons by which she hoped, in the interests of Lord Fylingdale, to make the girl discontented and ready to throw herself, fortune and all, into the arms of herself and her associates. As yet she had made little impression. Molly was not anxious for any change. She would be content to go on as before—the darling of her old

guardian—with her friends and the people among whom she had lived all her life—simple in their tastes, homely in their manners; to be like her mother, a maker of bread, cakes, and puddings; a brewer of ale; the mistress of the still-room.

'Why, Jack,' she said, telling me something of this lesson in politeness, 'I am to go away; to live in London: to leave my mother; never to see the Captain any more; never to do anything again; not to make any more puddings—such as you like so much; to play cards every night; to have no friends; and to backbite and slander everybody I know. If this is the polite world, Jack, let me never see it. 'Tis my daily prayer.'

You shall hear how her prayer was granted, yet not in the way she would have asked. And this, I say again, is the way in which many of our prayers are granted. We get what is good for us—if we pray for that good thing—but not by the way we would have chosen.

CHAPTER XX

FIVE O'CLOCK IN THE MORNING

It was the custom with some of the High Fliers or the Bucks, as they were called, when the Card Room was closed, to go off together to a tavern, there to finish the evening drinking, singing, gambling, and rioting the whole night through and long after daylight. Truly the town of Lynn witnessed more profligacy and wickedness during this summer than all its long and ancient history had contained or could relate.

The Assembly was held twice a week—on Tuesday and on Friday. It was on Tuesday night that a certain statement was made in a drunken conversation which might have awakened suspicion of some dark design had it been recorded. A small company of the said High Fliers, among whom were Colonel Lanyon and the young man named Tom Rising, marched off to the tavern most frequented by them, after the closing of the Rooms, and called for punch, cards, and candles. Then they sat down to play, with the ungodly and profane discourse which they affected. They played and drank, the young men drinking fast and hard, the Colonel, after his custom, keeping his head cool.

The night in May is short; the daylight presently began to show through the red curtains of the tavern

window; then the sun rose; the players went on regardless of the dawn and of the sun. One of them pulled back the curtains and blew out the candles. But they went on noisily. One of them fell off his chair, and lay like a log; the rest drew close, and continued to drink and to play. Among them no one played higher or more recklessly than Tom Rising. It was a game in which one holds the bank and takes the bets of the players. Colonel Lanyon held the bank, and took Tom's bets, which were high, as readily as those of the others which were low.

At five in the morning he laid down the cards.

'Gentlemen,' he said, 'we have played enough, and taken more than enough, I fear. Let us stop the game at this point.'

'You want to stop,' said Tom Rising, whose face was flushed and his speech thick, 'because you've been winning. I want my revenge—I will have my revenge.'

'Sir,' said the Colonel, 'any man who says that I refuse revenge attacks my honour. No, sir. To-morrow, that is to say, this evening, or any other time you please except the present, you shall have your revenge, and as much as you please. I appeal to the company. Gentlemen, it is now five o'clock, and outside broad daylight. The market bells have already begun. Are we drunk or sober?'

'Drunk, Colonel, drunk,' said the man on the floor.

'If we are drunk we are no longer in a condition fit for play. Let us therefore adjourn until the evening. Is this fair, gentlemen, or is it not? I will go on if you please.'

'It is quite fair, Colonel,' one of them replied. 'I believe you have lost, and you might insist on going on.'

'Then, let us look to the counters.' They played with counters, each representing a guinea or two or five, as had been agreed upon at the outset. So every man fell to counting and exchanging until all had done except Tom

Rising, who sat apparently stupid with drink. Then they began to pay each other on the differences.

'Twenty-five guineas, Colonel.'

The Colonel passed over the money with cheerfulness.

'Forty-three guineas, Colonel.'

He paid this sum—and so on with the rest. He had lost, it appeared, to every one of the players except Tom Rising, whose reckoning was not made up. They were all paid immediately and cheerfully. Now, the gentlemen of Norfolk are as honourable in their sport as any in the kingdom, but they seldom lose without a curse or two. This cheerfulness, therefore, under ill fortune surprised them.

The Colonel turned to Tom, whose eyes were closing. 'Mr. Rising, we will settle, if you please, after we have slept off the punch.'

Tom grunted and tried to speak. He was at that point of drunkenness when he could understand what was said, but spoke with difficulty. It is one of the many transient stages of intoxication.

'Then, gentlemen,' said the Colonel, 'we can meet again whenever you please. I only hope that you are satisfied with me for stopping the play at this point.'

'We are, Colonel. We are quite satisfied.' So they pushed back their chairs and rose somewhat unsteadily. But they had all won, and therefore had reason to be satisfied.

'I'm not—not satisfied.' Tom Rising managed to get out these words and tried, but without success, to sit square and upright.

'Well, sir,' said the Colonel, 'you shall have your revenge to-morrow.'

'I want it now—I'll have it now. Bring another bowl.' His head dropped again.

'The gentleman,' said the Colonel, 'is not in a condition to play. It would be cruel to play with him in this state.'

'Come, Tom,' one of them shook him by the arm, 'wake up and be reasonable.'

'I've lost again, and I want revenge.'

'To-morrow, Tom, the Colonel will give you as much revenge as you please.'

Tom made no reply. He seemed asleep.

'He shall have as much revenge as he pleases. Meantime, gentlemen, we have been pleasant together, so far. But this young gentleman plays high—very high. I am ready to meet his wishes; but, gentlemen—far be it from me to hint that he is not a gentleman of large estate—but the fact is that he has lost pretty heavily and wants to go on continually.'

'Yesterday,' Tom spoke with closed eyes, 'it was eight hundred. To-day it's—how much to-day?'

They looked at each other. 'Gentlemen,' said the Colonel, 'you have heard what he says. I assure you that the high play was forced upon me.'

They knew Tom to be the owner of a pretty estate of about £1200 a year, and they knew him to be a sportsman, eager and reckless. Eight hundred pounds is a large sum to raise upon an estate of £1200, even if there were no other demands upon it.

'He has a good estate,' said one.

'Say, rather, had a good estate,' corrected another.

'I need not point out, gentlemen,' the Colonel observed severely, 'the extreme injustice of admitting to our circle those who venture to play beyond their means. Play demands, above all things, jealousy in admittance. If men of honour meet for a few hours over the cards, the least they can demand is that, since they have to pay at sight, or within reasonable time, no one shall be admitted

who is not able to pay within reasonable time, whatever losses he may make. You and I, gentlemen,' he continued, 'have not forced this high play upon our friend here.'

'No. Tom would always fly higher than his neighbours.'

'I think, Colonel,' said one of them gravely, 'that this matter concerns the honour of the place and the county. You come among us a man of honour; you play and pay honourably. We admit Tom Rising into our company. He must raise the money. But you will grant him time. Eight hundred pounds and more——'

'Perhaps a thousand,' said the Colonel.

'Cannot be raised in a moment. We are not in London; there are no money-lenders with us; and I know not how much has been already raised upon the estate. But, Colonel, rest assured that the money shall be duly paid. Perhaps it will be well not to admit poor Tom to our table in future, though it will be a hard matter to deny him.'

Then Tom himself lifted his head.

'I can hear what you say, but I am too drunk to talk. Colonel, it's all right. Wait a day or two.' He struggled again to sit upright. One of his friends loosened his cravat, another took off his wig and rubbed his head with a wet cloth. 'Why,' he said, 'I am sober again. Let's have another bowl and another game.'

'No, no,' his friends cried out together. 'Enough, Tom; get up and go to bed.'

'Colonel Lanyon,' he said, 'and friends all—gentlemen of this honourable company'—he ran his words together as men in liquor use—but they understood him perfectly. 'I will play as high as I like; and as deep as I like; and as long as I like. I will play till I have stripped every man among you to the very bones. Why do I say this?

Because, gentlemen, after Friday night I shall be the richest man in the county. D'ye hear? The richest man in the county. You don't know how? Very well. Do you think I am going to tell you? Ho! ho! when you hear the news, you'll say, 'twas only Tom—only Tom Rising—had the courage to venture and to win.'

'He means the hazard table,' said the Colonel.

'No; not the hazard table,' Tom went on. 'Oh! I know the table and the woman who keeps the bank, and pretends to weep when you lose. I know about her. I've heard talk about her. What is it? Don't remember. Tell you to-morrow.'

'He should stop talking,' said the Colonel; 'we must not listen to his wanderings.'

'Richest man in the county,' he repeated. 'Colonel, I like your company. You lay down your money like a man. In a week, Colonel, I'll have it all; there shan't be a guinea left among you all. Richest man in county—make—guineas—fly.' His head sank down again. He was once more speechless.

His friends looked from one to the other. What did Tom Rising mean?

'Gentlemen,' said the Colonel, 'he has been drinking for many days. He has some kind of a fit upon him. After a sleep he will be better. Just now he dreams of riches. I have known men in such a condition to see animals, and think that they are hunted by rats and clawed by devils.'

Again Tom lifted his head and babbled confusedly.

'The richest man—the richest man in the whole county. After Friday night—not to-night—after Friday night. I have found out a short way to fortune. The richest man in the county.'

So they left him sleeping in his chair, with his head on the table among the glasses and the spilt punch. It was

not long, however, before they discovered what his words had meant. It was not the raving of a drunken man, but the betrayal in his cups—unfortunately, only a partial revelation of the abominable wickedness by which he proposed to acquire sudden wealth. Said I not that Tom Rising was never one to be balked or denied when he had set his heart upon a thing—nor was he to be restrained by any consideration of law, human or Divine; or of consequences in this world or the next. You shall now hear what he designed and what he called the shortest way, and how he was going to become the richest man in the county.

CHAPTER XXI

MOLLY'S SECOND APPEARANCE

Molly's first appearance was at the Assembly of Tuesday; her second on that of Friday. Between these two days, as you have seen, a good many things happened, not the least important of which was Lady Anastasia's 'adoption,' so to speak, of Molly.

On Tuesday she came with the Captain, whose appearance betrayed the old sailor, followed by the young sailor, transformed, for one night only, into a fine gentleman. On that occasion she was dressed with an extravagant display of jewels which might have suited an aged Duchess at Court, but was entirely unfitting to a young girl in the Assembly of a watering-place; she then danced as if every step had been recently taught her (which was indeed the case) and as if every posture was fresh from the hands of the dancing-master.

This evening she came in the company and under the protection of the Lady Anastasia herself, whose acceptance of her right to appear could not be questioned, save in whispers and behind the fan. The former partner in the minuet, he who sprawled and trod the boards like an elephant; the sailor who would pass for a gentleman—in a word, her old friend, Jack Pentecrosse (myself)—was not present. I had proposed to accompany her, but in the morning I received a message from Lady Anastasia,

'Would Mr. Pentecrosse be so very good as to call upon her immediately?'

I went. I found her the most charming lady, with the most gracious manner that I had ever seen. She was, indeed, the only lady of quality with whom I have ever conversed. It seemed as if she understood perfectly my mind as regards Molly, because while she humiliated me, at the same time she made me feel that the humiliation was necessary in the interests of Molly herself. In a word, she asked me not to accompany Molly again to the Assembly, nor to present myself there; and, therefore, not to remind the company that Molly's friends were young men who were not gentlemen. 'You have the face and the heart, Mr. Pentecrosse,' she said, laying her white hand on my arm, 'of a man of honour. With such a man as yourself, one does not ask for a shield and a pedigree. But where women are concerned some things are necessary. You love our Molly'—she said 'our' Molly, and yet she was in league with the Earl, that arch villain among lost souls. 'You love her. I read it in your betraying blush and in your humid eyes. Therefore you will consent to this sacrifice with a cheerful heart. And, Mr. Pentecrosse—I would willingly call you Jack, after Molly's sisterly fashion—come to see me again. It does me good—a woman of fashion, which too often means of hollow hearts—to converse with a young man so honest and so simple. Come again, Jack. I am here nearly every morning after prayers.'

I obeyed, of course. Who could resist such a woman? Well, Molly appeared under her protection. She was now dressed with the simplicity that belongs to youth, yet with a simplicity only apparent, and not real. For the cloth of gold and the embroidery had vanished; the bracelets, heavy with rubies and emeralds, had disappeared; the golden

cestus, the diamonds, the gold chains, all were gone. But the pink silk gown and the white silk petticoat which she wore were costly; the neck and the sleeves were edged and adorned with lace such as no other lady in the room could show; round her neck lay a necklace of pearls as big as cobnuts; on her wrists hung a fan whose handle was set with sapphires; and in her hair, such was the simplicity of the maiden, was placed a white rose. Her head was not built after the former manner, but was covered now with natural curls, only kept in place by the art of the *friseur*. In a word, it was Molly herself, not an artificial Molly; Molly herself, just adorned with the feminine taste which raised the Lady Anastasia above the blind laws of mere fashion, who now entered the room. She proclaimed herself once more as the heiress with a more certain note and with less ostentation.

'With her Ladyship! With the Lady Anastasia!' they whispered behind their fans. 'What next? Are there no ladies in the room but she must pick up this girl out of the gutter?' But they did not say these things aloud; on the contrary, they pressed around her Ladyship, gazing rudely and curiously upon the intruder.

'Ladies,' said Lady Anastasia, 'let me present my young friend, Miss Molly, the heiress of Lynn. I entreat your favour towards Miss Molly, who deserves all the favours you can afford, being at once modest, as yet little acquainted with the world of fashion, and endowed by fortune with gifts which are indeed precious.'

They began with awkwardness and some constraint to express cold words of welcome; but they could not conceal their chagrin, and two or three of them withdrew from the throng and abstained altogether after that evening from the society of her Ladyship, and, as they were but plain wives of country gentlemen, this abstention cost them

many pangs. For my own part, now that I know more about the opinions of gentlefolk, I confess that I think they were right. If there is an impassable gulf, as they pretend, between the gentleman and the mere citizen or the clown, then they stood up for their principles and their order. Why there should be this impassable gulf I know not; nor do I know who dug it out and set one class on one side and one on the other; whereas it is most true that there are many noble families whose ancestors were either merchants or were enriched by marriages with the daughters of merchants. Of such there are many witnesses. If, on the other hand, a girl can be received and welcomed among the Quality simply because she has a great fortune, there can be no such gulf, and the passage from one class to the other is a matter of worldly goods only. There are also cases in which the sons of noble and gentle houses have entered into the service of merchants, and have themselves either succeeded and made themselves rich, or have sunk down to the levels of retail trade and of the crafts.

Another humiliation was in store for these ladies. When Lord Fylingdale entered the Assembly he walked across the room, saluted Lady Anastasia, and bowed low to Molly, who blushed and was greatly confused at this public honour.

'Miss Molly,' he said, 'permit me to salute the town of Lynn itself in your fair person. The town of Lynn is our hostess; you are the Queen of Lynn; let me invite your Majesty to open the ball with me.'

So saying, he took her hand and led her out to the middle of the room, while the music struck up and the company formed a ring.

As for me, you have seen that I made a promise. I kept it in the spirit, but not in the letter. That is to say, I went in my ordinary Sunday clothes, and stood at the

door with the crowd and looked in at the gay scene. Molly danced with his Lordship. My heart sank when I saw the ease and dignity of his steps, and the corresponding grace of hers. There was neither sliding nor sprawling. Then after the dance I saw her standing beside the Lady Anastasia, her eyes sparkling, her cheek flushed, smiling and laughing, while a whole troop of gentlemen surrounded her with compliments. She seemed quite happy with them. As for me, I felt that I was no longer of any use to her; she was flying far above me; my place was at the door with those who had no right to enter. So I stole away out of the Gardens and into the silent streets, while the music followed me, seeming to laugh and to mock me as I crept along with unwilling feet and sinking heart. 'Go home! Go home!' it said. 'Go home to your cabin and your bunk! This place is not for you. Go home to your tarpaulin and your salt junk and your rum!'

I did not obey immediately. I went to the Captain's. Molly's mother was sitting there alone. Nigra was at the Assembly to look after her mistress; the Captain was there also, looking on from a corner; Molly's mother was alone in the parlour, her work in her hands, stitching by the light of a single tallow candle; and while she stitched her lips moved.

She looked up. 'Jack,' she cried, 'where is Molly?'

'She is enjoying herself with her new friends. I am no longer wanted. So I came away.'

'My poor Jack!' She laid down her needlework and looked at me. 'You can't make up your mind to lose her. What do you think I feel about it, then? Sure, a mother feels more than a lover. If she goes, Jack, she will never come back again. We shall lose her altogether. She will never come back.' With this the tears rolled down her cheek.

'We ought not to grumble and to grutch,' she went on. 'Why, it is for her own good. The Captain has told us all along that she was too great a catch for any of the folk about here. There is never a day but he tells me this, again and again. Not a man, he says, is worthy of such a fortune! Jack, when I think of the days when my man and me were married! He never wanted me to know how rich he was. What did I want with the money? I wanted the man, not his fortune. The jewels and the chains lay in the cupboard—the foolish glittering things! He followed simple ways, and lived like his neighbours. And as for Molly, I've brought her up as her poor father would have had it; there is no better housewife anywhere than Molly; no lighter hand with the crust; no surer hand with the home-brewed; no safer hand with the poultry. And all to be thrown away because she's got such a fortune as would be wasted on an honest lad like you, Jack, or some good gentleman from the countryside.'

'We can do nothing, mother—except to wish her happiness.'

'Nothing; not even to find out the kind of man she is to marry. The Captain is all for taking this Lord Fylingdale's advice. Why his Lordship should take to the Captain I cannot understand. Sammy Semple was here to-day— a worm, a wriggling worm—saying how soft and virtuous his Lordship is. Well, Jack, I thought—if he has no masterfulness in him he isn't any kind of man to advise about a woman. Now, Molly's father had a fine quick temper of his own, and Molly needs a master. Then this Lady Anastasia, who seems kindly, offers to take her to town, where she will learn cards and wickedness. But I doubt, Jack—I doubt. My mind is full of trouble. It is a dreadful thing to have a rich daughter.'

'Would to God,' I said, 'she had nothing.'

'For the men they will come around her; and the women they will hate her—and she will be too good for her own folk, and too low for the folks above, and they will all want her money, and they will all scorn her.'

'Nay,' I said, 'she is too beautiful.'

'Beauty! Much women care about beauty! I have dreams at night, and I wake up terrified, and the dreams remain with me still in the waste of the night like ghosts. Oh, Jack, Jack, I am a miserable woman!'

I left her. I rowed off to the ship and sought my cabin.

After dancing with his Lordship, who then offered his hand to a lady of the county, Molly stood up with the young man called Tom Rising, who was by this time as sober as could be expected after such a night. He, in the hearing of everybody, loaded her with compliments of the common kind, such as would suit a milkmaid, but were not proper for a modest woman to hear. To these, however, Molly returned no reply, and danced as if she heard them not. She then rejoined Lady Anastasia, and, with her, retired to the Card Room, whither many of the young men followed her. She stood beside her Ladyship, and obliged the young men by choosing cards for them, on which they lost or won. Tom Rising followed her, and stood beside her with flushed face and trembling hands. It was remarked afterwards that he seemed to assume the care of her. He kept gazing upon Molly with fierce and ravenous looks, like a wolf who hungers after his prey and lives to wait for it. He played the while, however, and lost during the evening, I believe, some hundreds of pounds; but, for reasons which you will presently hear, he never paid that money.

When the country dances began Lord Fylingdale led out Molly once more and placed her at the head. It was

too much. Some of the ladies refused to dance at all. Those who did were constrained and cold. But Molly was triumphant. She was not an angel. One could not blame her for resenting the flouts and scorn with which she had been treated. Now, however, she was the first lady of the company next to Lady Anastasia, because she had been taken out both for the minuet and the country dance by the first gentleman present.

I do not think that his Lordship paid her any compliments. He danced as he moved and spoke, with a cold dignity which stiffened his joints. Now, in a country dance, Molly, for her part, danced all over, her feet and her body moving together, her hands and arms dancing, her eyes dancing, her hair dancing. They danced quite down the lines until every couple had had their turn.

'Miss Molly,' said her partner, 'you dance with the animation of a wood nymph, or, perhaps, a nymph of the ocean. I would that the ladies of London possessed half the vivacity of the Lady of Lynn.'

He offered her the refreshment of wine or chocolate, but she declined, saying that the Captain now would be wishing her to go home, and that her chair would be waiting.

So his Lordship led her to the door, where, indeed, her chair was waiting, but no Captain, and, bowing low, he handed her in and shut the door, and he returned to the Assembly, and Molly's chair was immediately lifted up and borne rapidly away, she sitting alone, thinking of the evening and of her great triumph, suspecting no evil and thinking of no danger. A minute later the Captain came to the door. There he saw Molly's chairmen, waiting with her chair. He looked about him. Where was Molly? He returned to the Assembly. The girl was not there. He looked into the Card Room. His Lordship was stand-

ing at the table looking on. 'My Lord,' said the Captain, in confusion, 'where is my ward?'

'Miss Molly? Why, Captain, I put her into her chair five minutes ago. She is gone.'

'Her chair?' The Captain turned pale. 'Her chair is now at the door with her chairmen.'

'What devilry is forward?' cried Lord Fylingdale. 'Come with me, Captain. Come with me!'

CHAPTER XXII

THE ABDUCTION

The daring attempt to carry off this heiress and to marry her by force proved in the end the most effective instrument in the success of Lord Fylingdale's schemes that could possibly be desired or designed. So great is my mistrust of the man that I have sometimes doubted whether the whole affair was not contrived by him. I dismiss the suspicion, however, not because it is in the least degree unworthy of his character, but because it is unworthy of the character of Tom Rising. To carry off a girl is not thought dishonourable, especially as it can always be made to appear that it was with the consent of the girl herself. But to enter into a conspiracy for the furtherance of another man's secret designs would be impossible for Tom Rising. Besides, his subsequent conduct proves that he was not in any way mixed up with the grand conspiracy of which most of the conspirators knew nothing.

The chair into which Molly stepped without suspicion, and without even looking for the Captain, who should have walked beside her, stood, as I have said, before the entrance of the Long Room. Outside the trees were hung with coloured lamps; the place was as bright as in the sunshine of noon—one would think that nothing could be done in such a place which would not be observed. There is, however, one thing which is never

observed; it is the personal appearance of servants. No one regards the boatman of the ferry; or the driver of the hackney coach; or the postboy; or the chairmen. The chair, then, stood with its door open opposite to the entrance of the Long Room. The chairmen stood retired, a little in the shade, but not so far off as to need calling, when Lord Fylingdale handed in the lady. This done, he stood hat in hand, bowing.

The chairmen stepped up briskly, seized the poles, and marched off with the quick step of those who have a light burden to carry. No one observed the faces of the chairmen, or, indeed, thought of looking at them; no one remarked the fact that Tom Rising walked out of the Long Room directly afterwards and followed the chair. Within, Molly sat unsuspecting, excited by the triumphs of the evening. The chair passed through the Gardens and the gates recently erected; instead of turning to the right, which would lead into Hogman's Lane, the chairmen turned to the left, through the town gate, and so, turning northwards, into the open fields. Yet Molly observed nothing. I think she fell asleep; when she came to herself she looked out of the window. On the right and on the left of her were open fields.

It was a clear evening. Towards the middle of May there is no black darkness, but only a dimmer outline and deeper shadows. Molly, who knew the country round Lynn perfectly well, understood at once that she had been carried outside the town; that she was no longer on the highroad but on one of the cross-tracks—one cannot call them roads—which connect the villages, so that there was very little chance of meeting any passengers or vehicles. And by the stars she saw that they were carrying her in a northerly direction.

She perceived, therefore, that some devilry was going

on. Now, she was not a girl who would try to help herself in such a deserted and lonely spot by shrieking; nor did she see that any good purpose would be served by calling to the chairmen to let her out. She sat up, therefore, her heart beating a little faster than usual, and considered what she should do.

No one is ignorant that an heiress goes in continual peril of abduction. To run away with an heiress; to persuade her; threaten her; cajole her; or terrify her into marriage is a thing which has been attempted hundreds of times, and has succeeded many times. Nay, there are, I am told, women of cracked reputation and in danger of arrest and the King's Bench for debt who will visit places of resort in order to pass themselves off as heiresses to great fortunes, hoping thereby to tempt some gallant adventurer to carry them off, and so to take over their debts instead of the fortunes they expected. And there are stories in plenty of adventurers looking about them for an heiress whom they may carry off at the risk of a duello, which generally follows, at the hands of the lady's friends.

Molly, therefore, though not a woman of fashion, understood by this time her value, especially in the eyes of the adventurer. And she also understood quite clearly at this moment that she had been carried away without the knowledge of her guardian, and that the intention of the abductor was nothing more or less than a forced marriage and the acquisition of her fortune. 'Jack,' she told me afterwards, 'I confess that I did wish, just for a little, that you might be coming along the road with a trusty club. But then I remembered that I was no puny thread-paper of a woman, but as strong as most men, and I took courage. Weapon I had none, except a steel bodkin stuck in my hair—a small thing, but it might

serve if any man ventured too near. And I thought, besides, that there would be a hue and cry, and that the country round would be scoured in all directions. They would most certainly grow tired of carrying me about in a chair; they must stop somewhere and put me into some place or other. I thought, also, that I could easily manage to keep off one man, or perhaps two, and that it would be very unlikely that more than one would attempt to force me into marriage. Perhaps I might escape. Perhaps I might barricade myself. Perhaps my bodkin might help me to save myself. I would willingly stab a man to the heart with it. Perhaps I might pick up something—a griddle would be a weapon handy for braining a man, or even a frying-pan would do. Whatever happened, Jack, I was resolved that nothing, not even fear of murder, should make me marry the man who had carried me off.'

There are found scattered about the by-roads of the country many small inns for the accommodation of persons of the baser sort. Hither resort, on the way from one village to another, the sturdy tramp, whose back is scored by many a whipping at the hands of constable and headborough. What does he care? He hitches his shoulders and goes his way, lifting from the hedge and helping himself from the poultry-yard. Here you may find the travelling tinker, who has a language of his own. Here you will find the pedlar with his pack. He is part trader, part receiver of stolen goods, part thief, part carrier of messages and information between thieves. Here also you will meet the footpad and the highwayman; the smuggler and the poacher, and the fugitive. If an honest man should put up at one of these places he will meet with strange companions in the kitchen, and with strange bedfellows in the chamber. If they suspect that he has

money they will rob him; if they think that he will give evidence against them they will murder him. In a word, such a wayside inn is the receptacle of all those who live by robbery, by begging, by pretence, and lies and roguery.

It was before such a wayside inn that the chairmen stopped. Molly knew it very well. It was at a place called Riffley's Spring; the inn is 'The Traveller's Rest'; it stood just two and a half miles from Lynn, and one mile from the village of Wootton. It was a small house, gloomy, and ill-lighted at the best; there was a door in the middle. The diamond panes of the windows were mostly broken in their leaden frames; the woodwork was decaying; the projecting upper floor darkened the lower rooms; in the dim twilight, when the chair stopped, the house looked a dark and noisome place, fit only for cut-throats and murderers.

The poles were withdrawn and the door thrown open. Molly, looking out, saw before her, hat in hand, her late partner, the young fellow they called Tom Rising.

'Oh!' she cried. 'Is it possible? I thought I was in the hands of some highwayman. Is this your doing, sir? I was told that you were a gentleman.'

He bowed low, and began a little speech which he had prepared in readiness:

'Madam, you will confess that you are yourself alone to blame. Fired with the sight of so much loveliness, what wonder if I aspired to possess myself of these charms! Sure a Laplander himself would be warmed, even in his frozen region.'

'Sir, what nonsense is this? What do you mean?'

'I mean, madam, that your lovely face and figure are sufficient excuse, not only in the eyes of the world, but in your own eyes, for an action such as this. The violence of the passion which——'

'Sir, will you order your fellows to take me back?'

'No, madam, I will not.'

'Then, sir, will you tell me what you propose to do?'

'I intend to marry you.'

'Against my consent?'

'I have you in my power. I shall ask your consent. If you grant it we shall enter upon married life as a pair of lovers should. If you refuse—I shall be the master, but you will be the wife.'

Molly laughed. 'You think that I am afraid? Very well, sir. If you persist you shall have a lesson in love-making that will last your lifetime.'

'Everything is fair in love. Come, madam, you will please to get out of the chair.'

'What a villain is this!' said Molly. 'He is in love with my fortune and he pretends it is my person. He thinks to steal my fortune when he runs away with me. You are a highwayman, Mr. Rising; a common thief and a common robber. You shall be hanged outside Norwich Gaol.'

Tom Rising swore a great oath, calling, in his blasphemous way, upon the Lord to inflict dire pains and penalties upon him if he should resign the lovely object of his affection now in his possession. You have heard that he had the reputation of a reckless daredevil who stuck at nothing, was daunted by nothing, and was like a bull-dog for his tenacity.

'Understand, madam,' he concluded this declaration, 'I am resolved to marry you. Resolved. Bear that in mind.'

'And I, sir, am resolved that I will not marry you. Resolved. Bear that in mind.'

'Never yet did I resolve upon anything but I had it. No; never yet.'

'Mr. Rising, you think you have me in your power. You shall see. Once more I ask you, as a gentleman, to send me back. Remember I have many friends. The whole town, high and low, will be presently out after me, scouring the country.'

'In an hour you will be at Wootton. The parson hath promised to await us there. You will be my wife in one short hour's time.'

'You waste words, sir.'

'You will have to alight, madam. The post-chaise is here to carry us to Wootton, where the parson waits to marry us. In an hour, I say, you shall be my wife.'

Molly looked out of the other window. The post-chaise was there with its pair of horses, and the postboy waiting at the horses' heads. She would have to make her stand at once, therefore. To get into the post-chaise with that man would be dangerous, even though she was as strong as himself, and in better condition since she was not a drinker of wine.

'I looked round at the house,' she told me afterwards. 'I thought that if I could get into the house I might gain some time—perhaps I could bar the door—perhaps I could find that griddle or the frying-pan of which I spoke. Or if it came to using the bodkin, there would be more room for my arm in a house than in a chair or a chaise. So I had one more parley, in order to gain time, and then slipped out.'

'Sir,' she said, 'I give you one more chance of retaining the name and reputation of gentleman. Carry me back, or else await the vengeance of my friends. I warn you solemnly that murder will be done before I marry you. Understand, sir, murder of you, or your confederates, or myself.'

She spoke with so much calmness and with so much

resolution that she aroused all his native obstinacy. Besides, it was now too late. The news of the abduction would be all over Lynn—he must carry the thing through. He swore another loud and blasphemous oath. Heavens! how he was punished! How swiftly and speedily!

Molly stepped out of the chair. Tom Rising, his hat in hand, again bowed low. 'Madam,' he said, 'you are well advised. Pray let me hand you into the chaise.'

She made no reply, but, rushing past him, darted into the house. She stumbled down one step and found herself in a room where the twilight outside could not penetrate. It was quite dark. She closed the door behind her and bolted it, finding a bolt in the usual place.

Then she waited a moment, thinking what she could do next. A rustling and a footstep showed that she was not alone.

'Who is there?' she cried. 'Is there no light?'

She heard the striking of flint and steel; she saw the spluttering yellow light of a match, and by its flickering she discerned an old woman trying to light a candle—a rushlight in a tin frame, with holes at the sides.

Molly looked quietly round the room. A knife lay on the table. She took it up. It was one of the rough clasp knives, used by rustics when they eat their dinners under the hedge. She stepped forward and took the light from the old woman's hand.

'Quick!' she said, 'who is in the house?'

'No one, except myself. He said the house was to be kept clear to-night.'

'Can they get in?'

'They can kick the house down if they like, it's so old and crazy.'

'Is there an upper room?'

The old woman pointed to the far corner. Molly now perceived that the place was the kitchen, the tap-room, the sitting-room, and all. A table was in the middle; a settle was standing beside the fireplace; there was a bench or two; mugs and cups of wood, pewter and common ware stood on the mantelshelf; a side of bacon hung in the chimney. In the corner, to which the old woman pointed, was a ladder. Molly ran across the room. At the top of the ladder there was a square opening large enough for her passage. She went up, and found herself, by the dim rushlight, in an upper chamber, the floor of which was covered with flock beds laid on the boards. There was one small frame of glass in the roof, which was not made to open. The place reeked with foul air, worse than the orlop deck or the hold after a voyage.

Down below she heard her captor kicking at the door. Apparently, the old woman drew back the bolt, for he came in noisily, swearing horribly. Apparently, the old woman pointed to the ladder, or perhaps the glimmer from the room above guided him. He came to the ladder and tried persuasion.

'Molly, my dear,' he cried, 'come down, come down. I won't harm you. Upon my honour I will not. I want only to put you into the chaise and carry you off to be married. Molly, you are the loveliest girl in the county. Molly, I say, there is nobody can hold a candle to you. Molly, I will make you as happy as the day is long. Molly, I love you ten times as well as that proud lord. He will not marry you. There isn't a man in all the company I will not fight for your sake. Don't think I will let any other man have you. Damn it, Molly, why don't you answer?'

For now she kept silence. The more he parleyed, the more time she gained. But she found one or two loose

boards that had been used for laying in trestles for the support of the flock beds. She laid them across the trap-door, but there was nothing to keep them down.

Then Tom Rising began to swear at the old woman.

'You fool! You blundering, silly, jenny ass of a fool! What the devil did you give her the candle for?'

'I didn't give it. She took it.'

'Go, get another candle, then.'

'There are no more candles, master,' said the old woman in her feeble voice. 'She's got the only one.'

'Molly, if you won't come down I shall force my way up.'

Still she kept silence.

He took two steps up the ladder and lifted the boards, showing the fingers of his left hand. Molly applied her knife, gently but dexterously; but it touched the bone, and taught him what to expect. He drew back with a cry of rage.

'Come down,' he said, 'or it will be worse for you. Come down, I say.'

He had not reckoned on a knife and on the girl's courage in using it.

'Molly,' he said again, more softly, 'come down.'

Still she maintained silence.

'You have no food up there,' he went on. 'Your window is only a light in the roof looking away from the road. No one from Lynn will come this way. If they do they will see nothing. You had better come down. Molly, I shall wait here for a month. I shall starve you out. Do you hear? By the Lord, I will set fire to the thatch and burn you out. By the Lord, you *shall* come down.'

So he raved and raged. Meantime the two chairmen, who were his own servants, stood, pole in hand, one in front of the house and one behind, to prevent an escape.

But this was impossible, because the room, as you have heard, had no other window than a small square opening in the roof, in which was fitted a piece of coarse, common glass.

'Jack,' she told me, 'when he talked of setting fire to the thatch I confess I trembled, because, you see, my knife would not help me there. And, indeed, I think he would have done it, because he was like one that has gone mad with rage. He was like a mad bull. He stormed, he raged, he cursed and swore; he called me all the names you ever heard of—such names as the sailors call their sweethearts when they are in a rage with them—and then he called me all the endearing names, such as loveliest of my sex, fairest nymph, tender beauty. What a man!'

Meantime she made no answer whatever, and the darkness and the silence and the obstinacy of the girl were driving the unfortunate lover to a kind of madness, and I know not what would have happened.

'Molly,' he said, 'willy nilly, down you come. I shall tear down the thatch. I would burn you out, but I would not spoil your beauty. I shall tear down the thatch, and my men shall carry you down.'

Then Molly made answer.

'I have a knife in my possession. Do not think that I am afraid to use it. The first man who lays hands on me I will kill—whether it is you or your servants.'

'That we shall see. Look ye, Molly, you are only a merchant's daughter, and I am a gentleman. Do you think I value that compared with marrying you? Not one whit. When we are married I will buy more land; I will be the greatest landowner of the whole county. Sir Robert will make me Sheriff. I will go into Parliament, Molly; he will make me a peer. Come down, I say.'

But she spoke no more.

Then he lost control of himself, and for a while stamped and swore, threatened and cursed.

'You will have it, then? Here, John, go and look for a ladder. There's always a ladder in the back-yard. Put it up against the thatch. Tear it down. Make a hole in the roof. Tear off the whole roof.'

The man propped his chair-pole against the door, and went round to look for the ladder and to obey orders.

'So,' Molly told me, 'I was besieged. Mr. Rising was below, but I had my knife, and he was afraid to venture up the steps. I heard the men clumping about outside. I heard them plant the ladder and climb up. Now, a countryman who understands a thatch is able to tear it off very quickly, either to make or mend a hole, or to tear down the roof altogether. And I feared that I must use my knife seriously. Was ever woman more barbarously abused? Well—I waited. By the quick tearing away of the straw I saw that the fellow on the ladder knew how to thatch a rick or a cottage. In a few minutes there would be a hole big enough for half a dozen men to enter. Jack'—her cheek flushed and her eye brightened—'God forgive me! But I made up my mind the moment that man stepped within the room to plunge my knife into his heart.'

If a woman's honour is dearer than her life, then surely it is more precious than a dozen lives of those who would rob her of that treasure.

However, this last act of defence was not necessary.

'Master,' cried the postboy, who was waiting with the chaise. 'Master, here be men on horseback galloping. I doubt they are coming after the lady.'

Tom Rising stepped to the door and looked down the road. The day was already beginning to break. He saw in the dim light a company of horsemen galloping along

the road; it was a bad road, and there had been rain, so that the horses went heavily. They were very near; in a few moments they would be upon him. He looked at the chaise. He made one more effort.

'Molly,' he said, 'come down quick. There is just time. Let us have no more fooling.'

Again she made no reply. Knife in hand, with crimson cheek and set lips, she watched the hole in the thatch and the man tearing it away.

Tom Rising swore again, most blasphemously. Then, seeing that the game was lost, he loosened his sword in its scabbard and stepped into the middle of the road.

CHAPTER XXIII

WHICH WAY TO FOLLOW?

I must admit that in the conduct of this affair Lord Fylingdale showed both coolness and resolution.

The news that the heiress of Lynn had been abducted spread immediately through the rooms; the whole company flocked to the doors, where Lord Fylingdale stood, calm and without passion, while beside him the old Captain stamped and cursed the villains unknown.

He called Molly's chairmen. What had those fellows seen? They said that they were waiting by order; that another chair stood before them at the door, the bearers of which were strangers to them, a fact which at this crowded season occurred constantly; that a gentleman whose name they knew not, but whom they had seen in the streets and at the Assembly, mostly drunk, had come out hastily and spoken to these chairmen; that his Lordship himself had handed the lady into the chair and closed the doors, to their astonishment, because they were themselves waiting for the lady; and that the chair was carried off instantly, leaving them in bewilderment, not knowing what to do.

He asked them, next, for a closer description of the gentleman. He was young, it appeared; he was red in the face; he looked masterful; he cursed the chairmen in a very free and noble manner; one of the chairmen gave him

his sword to wear, which is not permitted in the Assembly; he was swearing all the time as if in great wrath.

'My Lord,' a gentleman interrupted, 'the description fits Tom Rising.'

'Has Mr. Rising been seen in the Assembly this evening?'

'He was not only here, but he danced with the lady.'

'Is he here now? Let someone look for Mr. Rising.'

There was no need to look for him, because the rooms—even the Card Room—were now empty, all the people being crowded about the doors.

'Where does he lodge? Let someone go to his lodgings.'

'With submission, my Lord,' said another. 'It is not at his lodgings that he will be found. After the Assembly, he goes to the "Rose Tavern," where he drinks all night.'

'Let someone go to the "Rose Tavern," then, and quickly. Captain Crowle, we will go to the "Crown" while inquiries are made. Gentlemen, there is great suspicion that an abominable crime hath been committed, and that this young lady hath been forcibly carried away for the sake of her fortune. I take blame to myself for not making sure that I was placing her in her own chair. This is my business. But I ask your help for the honour of the Spa and the company.'

A dozen gentlemen stepped forward and offered their help and their swords, if necessary.

Among them was Colonel Lanyon.

'Come, then. Let us adjourn to the "Crown" and make inquiries. Be of good cheer, Captain. We will find out which way they took. If they have nothing but the chair to carry her away, we can easily catch them up.'

'I know my girl,' said the Captain. 'It is not one man

who can daunt her, nor will a dozen men force her to marry against her will. If they try there will be murder.'

'If we cannot find the way they took, we must scour the country.'

At the gate of the Gardens they learned that the keeper had seen the chair go out, and observed that it was closely followed by a gentleman whom he could only describe by his height, which was taller than the average. Now, Tom Rising was six feet at least.

At the 'Crown,' in Lord Fylingdale's room, they held a brief consultation, after which the gentlemen who had volunteered their help went out into the town to make inquiries.

In a few minutes they began to return. It was ascertained that Tom Rising was not at his lodging; nor was he at the 'Rose Tavern'; nor could he be found at any of the taverns used by gentlemen; this strengthened the suspicion against him.

Then one remembered the strange words of the Tuesday night, in which Tom Rising had promised his friends that he would, before the week was done, be the richest man in the county—rich enough to play with them until he had stripped every man as bare as Adam.

Those words were taken as mere drunken ravings. But now they seemed to have a meaning. Where was Tom Rising?

Another discovery was that of the two men belonging to the chair in which Molly was carried off. They were found in one of the low taverns by the riverside, drinking.

One of them was already too far gone to speak. The other, with a stronger head, was able to give information, which he was quite ready to do. A gentleman, he said, had engaged the chair, and had given them a guinea to drink if they would suffer him to find his own chairmen.

His description of the gentleman corresponded with that already furnished. He spoke of a tall gentleman with a flushed face and rough manner of speech. He knew nothing more, except that two men, strangers to himself, had taken the chair and carried it off.

'Gentlemen,' said his Lordship, 'there can be, I fear, no doubt the abduction of Miss Molly has been designed and attempted by Mr. Rising. Fortunately, he cannot have gone very far. It remains for us to find the road which he has taken.'

They fell to considering the various roads which lead out of the town. There is the highroad to Ely, Cambridge, and London; but to carry a chair with an unwilling lady in it on the highroad, frequented by night as well as by day with travellers of all kinds and strings of pack-horses, would be ridiculous. There was the road which led to the villages on the east side of the Wash; there was also the road to Swaffham and Norwich; another was the road to Hunstanton.

'I am of opinion,' said one of the gentlemen, 'that he has fixed on some lonely place not far from Lynn, where he could make her a prisoner until she complies with his purpose and consents to marrying him.'

Captain Crowle shook his head.

'She would never consent,' he repeated. 'My girl is almost as strong as any man, and quite as resolute. There will be murder if this villain attempts violence.'

Just then the landlady of the 'Crown' threw open the door and burst in. 'Oh, gentlemen, gentlemen!' she cried, 'I have found out where they are gone. Ride after them. Ride after them quick, before worse mischief is done. I have ordered all the horses in the stables to be saddled. There are eight. Quick! gentlemen, for the love of the Lord, ride after them.'

'Quick! quick!' said his Lordship.

'Where are they? Where are they?'

The Captain sprang up.

'They are on their way. They cannot be there yet.'

'But where? Where?'

'Mr. Rising ordered a post-chaise to wait for him at ten o'clock.'

'He left the Gardens,' said his Lordship, 'about that time. Go on.'

'He ordered it at the "Duke's Head." The postboy told the ostler his orders. He was to wait for Mr. Rising at "The Traveller's Rest," at Riffley's Spring, on the way to Wootton.'

'"The Traveller's Rest"? What kind of place is that?'

'It is a bad place, my Lord—a villainous place—on a lonely road up and down which there is little travelling. It is a resort of pedlars, tinkers, and the like—gipsies, vagabonds, footpads, and rogues. It is no place for a young lady.'

'It is not, indeed,' said one of the gentlemen.

'Gentlemen,' the landlady repeated, 'ride after him! Ride after them! Oh! the sweet Miss Molly!'

'Are the horses ready?'

'They will be ready in a minute.'

'Gentlemen, there are, you hear, eight horses. Captain Crowle will take one. I will take another. The remaining six are at your disposal. I shall feel honoured if you will accompany me; but on one condition, if you will allow me to make a condition. The man will fight, I suppose?'

'Tom Rising,' one of them replied, 'would fight the devil.'

'One could desire nothing better. The condition is that when we overtake Mr. Rising you will leave him to me. That is understood?'

'My Lord, we cannot, by your leave, allow your valuable life to be at the hazard of a duel with a man both desperate and reckless.'

'I shall take care of myself, I assure you. Meantime, if I fall, I name Colonel Lanyon to succeed me, and after him, should he, too, unhappily fall, you will yourselves name his successor. Gentlemen, we must rescue the lady and we must punish the abductor. I hear the horses. Come.'

CHAPTER XXIV

THE PUNISHMENT

The postboy, foreseeing events which might require a clear stage, warily drew his chaise off the road, which here widened into a small area trodden flat by many feet, into the grassy field at the side, and stood at his horses' heads in readiness.

The men on the ladder, who were pulling away at the thatch with zeal, stopped their work. 'What's that, George?' asked one. 'Seems like horses. They're coming after the young lady, likely;' so he slid down the ladder, followed by the other, and they ran round to the front, seizing their poles in case of need. At elections, and on the occasion of a street fight, the chairman's pole has often proved a very efficient weapon. Handled with dexterity it is like a quarter-staff, but heavier, and will not only stun a man, but will brain him, or break arm, leg, or ribs for him.

'For my part,' Molly told me, 'I saw them suddenly desist from their work, though in a few minutes the hole in the thatch would nave been large enough to admit of a man's passing through. I was waiting within, knife in hand. Do you think I would have suffered one of those fellows to lay hand upon me? Well, in the midst of their work they stopped, they listened, and they stepped down the ladder. What did this mean? There was no window

to the loft except a single frame with half a dozen small diamond-shaped panes too high up to serve any purpose except to admit a little light. I put my head through the hole in the thatch. And I heard—imagine my joy—the clatter of horses and the voices of the horsemen. And then I knew, and was quite certain, that my rescue had arrived. "Jack," I said to myself, "has found out the way taken by this villain, and is riding after him."'

Alas! I, who should have been riding in the front of all, was at that moment unconsciously sleeping in my bunk aboard the *Lady of Lynn*.

'I thought that at such a moment Mr. Rising would be wholly occupied with defending himself. I therefore withdrew the boards from the top of the stair and looked down. No one was in the room below, that I could see. I cautiously descended. In the corner of the settle by the fireplace there was the old woman of the house.

'"They are coming after you, Missy," she said. "I knew how it would end. I warned him. I told him that everything was against it. I read his luck by the cards and by the magpies, and by the swallows. Everything was against it. They are coming. Hark! They are very close now, and they will kill him!"

'I ran to the open door. Mr. Rising was in the middle of the road without, his sword in his hand; behind him stood his chairmen. He was not going to give me up without a fight. The postboy had drawn the chaise into the field, and the sedan-chair was standing beside it. And down the road, only a little way off, I saw, in the growing light of daybreak, Lord Fylingdale leading, the Captain beside him, and half a dozen gentlemen following, all on horseback.'

'There she is! There is Molly!' cried the Captain. 'What cheer, lass? What cheer?'

Lord Fylingdale held up his hand. The whole party drew rein and halted. Then their leader dismounted. They were now about twenty yards from the men. He threw his reins to the nearest of the little troop. 'Gentlemen,' he said, 'we must proceed with this business without hurry or bluster, or threats. Mr. Rising will, perhaps, threaten and bluster. We are here to rescue a lady and to punish a villain. Let both be done without the appearance of wrath or revenge. Captain Crowle, do not dismount, I entreat you, until the conclusion of the next act. Miss Molly is, as you see, apparently safe and unhurt.' They obeyed.

'I shall now measure swords with the young gentleman who thinks that he can carry off heiresses with impunity. I would advise you to advance a little closer to the house. He must understand that punishment awaits him, if not from me, then from some other of this company.'

'Look at Tom,' said one of them. 'His blood is up. He is now all for fighting. He means mischief, if ever he has meant mischief. I remember at Swaffham when he fought the young squire of Headingley. That was about a girl, too. A mere worthless drab of a tavern servant. Tom broke down the man's guard and ran him through in half a minute. I wish we were well out of this job.'

Tom stood in the road, his sword in his hand, his hat lying on the ground before him. If flaming cheeks and eyes as fiery as those of a bull brought to bay mean mischief, then Tom's intention was murderous.

'To thwart Tom in anything,' the gentleman went on, 'is dangerous; but to take away his girl—and such a girl—to rob him of that great fortune just at the moment of success—would madden the mildest of men. He looks like a madman. Should one warn his Lordship? And he has got two chairmen with their poles in readiness. We

should ride down upon them before they can do any mischief.' So they whispered.

Said Captain Crowle: 'Kill him, my Lord—kill the villain. Kill him.'

'Let me warn your Lordship,' said the gentleman who had last spoken, 'his method will be a fierce attack; he will try to break down your guard.'

'I know that method,' Lord Fylingdale replied coldly. Then he stepped forward and took off his hat. 'Mr. Rising,' he said, 'this affair might very well be settled by two or three sailors or common porters. We are willing, however, to treat you as a gentleman, which, sir, you no longer deserve.'

'Go on, go on,' said Tom. 'Twill be all the same in five minutes.'

'I am therefore going to do you the honour of fighting you.'

'I shall show you how I appreciate that honour. Stop talking, man, and begin.'

'I must, however, warn you that if you are to fight as a gentleman you must try to behave as one, for this occasion only. Should you attempt any kind of treachery, my friends will interfere. In that case you will certainly not leave the field alive.'

'What do you want, then?'

'You must send away those two hulking fellows behind you. I am willing to fight you with swords, but I am not going to fight your lackeys with clubs.'

Tom turned round. 'Here, you fellows, get off. Go and stand beside the chair. Whatever happens, don't interfere. Well, my Lord, the sooner this comes off, the better.'

He laid down his sword and took off coat and waistcoat, turning up the sleeve of his right arm. Then he turned to

Molly and saluted her. 'Mistress Molly,' he said, with a grin, 'you are going to have a very fine sight. Perhaps, when it is over, you will be sorry for your shilly-shally stand off—no, I won't say it. You're not worth carrying off. If I'd known! Now, my Lord.'

Lord Fylingdale had also removed his coat and waistcoat, and now stood in his shirt, with the sleeves rolled up, hatless.

Just at that moment the sun rose swiftly, as is his manner in this flat country. It was as if the sky had leaped into light in order to give these swordsmen a clearer view of each other. They were a strange contrast. Molly's champion, erect, pale, and calm; his adversary bent, as if with passion, grasping his sword with eager hand.

'He means mischief,' repeated the gentleman of the troop who had spoken before. 'I would this business was ended. I wonder if the noble lord can fight. He does not look afraid, anyhow.'

'He looks as if he could feel neither fear nor anger, nor love, nor any passion at all. He is an iceberg. Ha! they are beginning.'

They faced each other.

The swords crossed. 'Look to yourself,' said Tom. 'I will split you like a pigeon.'

He stamped and lunged. The thrust was parried, easily and lightly. Tom lunged again; and again, with a slight turn of the wrist, the thrust was parried. But as yet Lord Fylingdale seemed to stand on the defensive.

'He knows how to fence,' they whispered. 'See! he means to tire his adversary. He parries everything. Tom thrusts like a madman. Why, he exposes himself at every lunge. See! he has lost his head. One would think he was fighting with an automaton who could only parry.'

At the door stood the object and cause of the encounter, the girl, namely, who had brought all this trouble upon Tom Rising's head. She stood motionless, hardly breathing, watching the duel, as they say the Roman women used to watch the fight of the gladiators in the amphitheatre, and as I have seen the Spanish women watch the men who fight the bull in their circus. I believe that women, in spite of their tender hearts, are carried away out of themselves by the sight of mere fighting. It is a spectacle which they cannot choose but gaze upon; it shows the true nature of man as opposed to that of woman. He stands up and risks his life, trusting sometimes to his skill, as in a duel with swords, and sometimes to chance, as on a battlefield where the bullets are flying. Molly, therefore, watched the fight with gleaming eyes and parted lips. She was almost ready to forgive the man who had attempted this injury for the sake of his courage, and she could not sufficiently admire his adversary for the cold and impassive way in which he met every furious attack, just with a simple turn of the wrist, as it seemed to her.

Tom was a strong and lusty fellow, and he could fight after his fashion, which was with thrust upon thrust, fast and furious, reckless of himself, so that he could engage his adversary wholly in defence until he found a moment of weakness.

He had fought many times, and hitherto without a scratch or a wound, the fight always ending with his adversary lying prostrate before him. On this occasion, however, he found that every thrust was parried; that his adversary yielded not so much as an inch of ground, and that he had to do with a wrist of iron and the eye of a hawk.

'I hope,' Molly told me later, 'that I desired not the

death of the young man. But I did desire his defeat. It was splendid to see him stamping on the ground and attacking like lightning. But it was more splendid to see his adversary immovable. He stood like a rock; he showed neither passion nor excitement. He parried every thrust with just a turn of his wrist.'

The gentlemen on horseback closed in and looked on, holding their breath. There was no longer any fear on account of their champion. For the first time in their lives they saw as fine a master of fence as ever came out of the schools of Paris. Meantime, the other man was as one maddened. He drew back; he roared like a bull; he rushed upon his enemy; he panted and gasped; but he continued the fight undaunted.

Suddenly his sword flew out of his hand, and fell in the field beside the chaise.

'Pick up your master's sword,' Lord Fylingdale ordered the chairmen.

The spectators looked to see Tom run through on the spot. On the contrary, Lord Fylingdale remained in his attitude of defence; he was playing with his enemy. 'Take your sword,' he said. 'You are at my mercy. But take your sword, man; we have only just begun.'

Tom received his sword, and wiped off the mud upon his shirt. Then he renewed the attack; but it was with less confidence. That one should refuse to finish the duel when he had disarmed his adversary was a thing beyond his experience.

'Tom is dashed,' said one of the company. 'It is all over with Tom.'

It was. After a few lunges, parried with the same quiet skill and calmness of manner, Tom's sword once more flew out of his hand. Then the duel was over, for Lord Fylingdale made one thrust and his sword passed clean

through the right arm at the shoulder, passing out at the other side.

Tom reeled; one of his chairmen ran to his help, and he fell upon the ground, fainting in a small pool of blood.

Lord Fylingdale paid no attention to him. He wiped his sword on the grass, replaced it in the scabbard, and put on his coat and waistcoat. This done, he advanced to Molly.

'Madam,' he said, 'we are fortunate, indeed, in being able to effect a rescue. This is not a place for a lady, nor is this a sight that one would willingly offer you. I trust that no violence has been used.'

'I thank your Lordship. It was a horrid sight. Oh! do not let the poor man die. He is a villain, but he has failed. Be merciful.'

Then the Captain came running up. 'Molly!' he cried, with the tears running down his face, 'Molly! We are not too late? They haven't married you? The villain is paid. He is paid, I take it. He hasn't married you yet? By the Lord, if he has I will brain him with my cudgel, so you shall be a widow as soon as a wife.'

'Captain, can you ask me? The man had a chaise waiting here, and would have forced me into it; but I ran into the house, and so to the upper floor, whither he could not follow. He set his men to pull off the thatch. What he would have done next I know not. But I could defend myself.'

'What is that in your hand, Molly?'

It was the knife, which she still held in readiness. She threw it away. 'I shall not need it now,' she said. 'What do you think I should have done with it?'

'Molly, I know what you would have done. I said that there was no man in England who could marry you against your will. It was his heart and not his shoulder that

would have received the knife. My dear, I knew my Molly. I knew my girl.'

Then the other gentlemen crowded round, offering their congratulations, no one taking the least notice of the unlucky Tom, who still lay pale and bleeding on the ground.

It was Lord Fylingdale who came to his assistance. 'Here, fellows,' he ordered the chairmen, 'take up your master and put him in the chaise—so. And as for you,' he addressed the postboy, 'here is a guinea. Drive as fast as you can back to Lynn. Put him to bed in his lodgings and send for a surgeon or a wise woman, or someone to look after the wound.'

'Will he die?' asked one of the bystanders.

'I should think it not unlikely. His wound is dangerous, and if I know anything about a man from his appearance I should say that he would be inclined to fever. But we are not concerned with his fate. Whether he dies or lives, he has attempted a villainous act, and has met with a fitting punishment.'

The carriage, with the wounded man in it, went rattling along the road, the jerks and bumps among the ruts being enough to keep the wound open and the blood flowing.

Then Lord Fylingdale called the chairmen. 'Who are you?' he asked. 'Do you belong to the town of Lynn?'

They looked at each other. Then one said, 'No; we be from Swaffham. Squire Rising sent for us to do his job.'

'Put in your poles. You must now carry the lady back.—We have done our work,' added his Lordship. 'It remains for us to escort Miss Molly home again. Madam, you can leave this foul den with the consciousness that you are avenged.'

'Indeed, I want no revenge.'

'Justice has been done. Justice is not revenge. You can now, madam, go back in the chair in which you were brought here. The villain who made the attempt is already on his way back. Since you desire mercy rather than revenge, we must hope that his wound is not fatal.'

So Molly re-entered the chair. Thus she was brought home in triumph. The Captain rode on one side; her champion on the other; before and behind her rode her mounted escort. If she had been a queen they could not have shown her greater deference and respect.

CHAPTER XXV

A GRATEFUL MIND

The news of the abduction, you may be sure, formed, next day, the only topic of talk in the Pump Room and the Gardens. There were many rumours and reports. Mr. Rising was allowed to be a villain of the deepest dye. He was also allowed to be a gentleman of the greatest courage and resolution. The duel was described with such embroideries and additions as the feminine imagination could invent. Lord Fylingdale was desperately wounded; no, only slightly wounded; no, he was not touched. Mr. Rising was brought home dead, in a pool of blood; no, he was wounded and not expected to live; and so on. He lay, indeed, at his lodgings in a fever, which held him for some days; but being young and strong, and in good health, except that his habit of drinking had inflamed his blood, he recovered, and, as you shall presently learn, escaped from certain toils and snares that had been laid with skill, and were promising success.

I am sorry to say that the opinion of the ladies remained adverse to Molly. It was universally acknowledged that she was a forward minx; that she ought to have known her place; that, had she not given encouragement, Mr. Rising could never have attempted his rash adventure. 'She wants to marry a gentleman. Naturally;

she thinks that money will buy anything. What is the good of having all these fine things—if, indeed, they are hers—if she is to marry in her own class, a quill-driver, a shopkeeper, a tarpaulin? As everybody knows, Mr. Rising is a gentleman of good family and good estate; could she look higher? She ought to feel honoured at being carried away by a gentleman. As for any rumour connecting her with Lord Fylingdale, one would be sorry for the poor wench if that was true, because nothing could be more impossible. Yet the ambition of a girl ignorant of the world may soar to heights incredible, like the soap-bubble, only to burst, or the sky-rocket, only to fall ignobly to the ground. It is not likely that his Lordship, said to be so fastidious, would bestow a serious thought upon the girl, save as representing the town of Lynn.' And so on . . . with whispers from one to the other at morning prayers, and louder talk in the Pump Room, and at the confectioner's and in the Gardens.

Meantime, the Captain made haste to wait upon his Lordship, in order to thank him more formally than in the turmoil and agitation of the evening had been possible.

'Captain Crowle,' said his Lordship, 'there needs no thanks. The honour of the Spa—of the company—was at stake. Could we look on unmoved when such a crime was committed under our very eyes? Sir, there were with me, as you saw, half a dozen gallant gentlemen, all pledged to take my place should I fall. Their swords were as much at the service of insulted virtue as my own.'

'You fought a desperate man, my Lord. Had you lost hand or eye for a moment, you would now be dead.'

'Captain, I do not lose my eye nor my hand. Nevertheless, to die for the honour of such a woman as Miss Molly should be happiness enough for any man.'

Said I not that the abduction was the very best thing that could possibly happen to Lord Fylingdale? Whether he understood the Captain's ambitions as regards himself, or not, I cannot say. We know, however, that the old man aimed at nothing short of a great alliance for his ward, a dream that was justified by the noble fortune which would go with her.

Lord Fylingdale knew, besides, that he himself had made a most favourable impression upon this simple sailor, who believed everything that he was told. And now, by the rescue of the girl, he had not only raised himself still higher in the estimation of the Captain, but he stood before Molly as a hero and a fearless avenger of insult and violence. Nothing could have been more fortunate.

'Sir,' he added, 'if you will carry me to Miss Molly herself, I would offer her my congratulations on the happy ending of her adventure. She is perhaps overcome by the terrors of the night.'

'Molly felt no terrors. She had a knife in her hand which might have proved more formidable to the young man than your Lordship's sword. But if you will honour my humble house, both Molly and I shall be still more grateful.'

Molly was in the kitchen making a beefsteak pie, with her sleeves rolled up and her apron on. 'Shall I go to my Lord as I am?' she said. 'Let me wash my hands and roll down the sleeves at least.'

She presented herself, therefore, in her plain morning dress, that in which she performed her domestic work. Perhaps she showed to greater advantage thus than in her silks and jewels.

'Miss Molly, your obedient servant.' His Lordship bowed as low as if he was addressing a countess at least.

'I have ventured to inquire after your health. Last night's adventure may have proved too great a shock.'

'I am quite well, my Lord, thanks to your bravery and your generosity, which I can never forget—never—not even if I wished to forget.'

'Never,' said the Captain.

'Whenever I hear of a brave man I shall think of your Lordship, and whenever I think of a gallant fight, it will be your Lordship fighting.'

'You think too highly of a simple affair, Miss Molly. Nevertheless, I am proud to have been of service to you.'

'At least we must continue grateful, because we have nothing that we can do in return.'

'I am not so sure of that.' He smiled kindly. 'We shall see. Meantime, Miss Molly, there is one thing which you might do to please me.'

'Oh, what is that?'

'You wore at your first appearance a large quantity of gold chains and precious stones. I am curious about such gauds. Will you allow me to see your treasures?'

It was an unexpected favour to ask. Molly laughed, however, and ran to fetch the box. She poured out the whole of the glittering contents upon the table. 'There, my Lord, and if I could venture to offer any of these things that would please you——'

He laughed. 'You are kindness itself, Miss Molly. But I am not a lady, and jewels are of no use to me. I have, however, at my poor house in Gloucestershire, my family jewels. Let me look at yours.'

He sat down and began to examine them closely. Apparently he understood jewels. It was as if he apprized their value. He placed some on one side; some on the other. 'This,' he said, 'is a diamond of the first water. Keep it very carefully. This has a slight flaw, yet,

with more careful cutting, it might become a valuable stone. This chain is fashioned by an Indian workman. None but an Indian can make a chain so fine and so delicate. See, it is no thicker than a piece of twine, and yet how careful and how intricate the workmanship! The man's fingers must have been more delicate than our craftsmen can imagine.' And so on through the whole of the treasure. 'Well, Miss Molly,' he said, 'there are few ladies, indeed, even of the highest rank, who can show so good a collection. I congratulate you with all my heart. Some day, I hope to see you at Court wearing these jewels and bearing—who knows?—a name as honourable as these are precious.'

'Your Lordship always encourages,' said the Captain. 'You hear, Molly? At Court and bearing an honourable name.'

She blushed and gathered up her treasures.

Her visitor looked around the room. It was the parlour. The homely appearance of the room, plainly furnished, as might be expected of a man in the Captain's position, was strangely inconsistent with the mass of treasure which he had just examined. The plain linsey-woolsey of the girl who owned the treasure was also out of proportion, so to speak, for he understood that this glittering pile of jewels represented a vast sum of money, and that the girl was far richer than the poet knew or even the Captain guessed. At the mere thought of getting possession of this treasure his blood quickened; but he remained, to all appearance, save for a slight and unwonted colour in his cheek, unmoved. I have never heard, nor can I guess, the value of these jewels, save that they were worth many thousands.

'These jewels,' he said coldly, 'should belong to a great lady. They deserve to be seen. They are thrown

away, save as portable property, unless they can be used to grace the Court. However . . . let me hope that they will not be thrown away. I think, Miss Molly, that your mother lives with you in this house. Perhaps this treasure is hers—or is it all your own?'

The Captain made answer. 'Molly's mother has no share. A modest sum of money, sufficient for her needs, is paid her out of the estate. The rest—all the rest belongs to Molly.'

'Truly she is first favourite with Dame Fortune, who, I hope, will not turn her wheel. Miss Molly, will you present me to madam, your mother?'

'With all my heart; but, my Lord, my mother is not used to being called madam.'

So saying, Molly retired to the kitchen, and presently returned, bringing her mother with her. She came in red faced from stooping over the kitchen fire, wiping her fingers, which she had hurriedly washed, on her apron, wearing at her side her great housekeeper's pocket, in which she carried a vast quantity of things necessary, useful, and handy, such as scissors, pins, a needle-case, the nutmeg grater, a corkscrew, a few weights, a thread paper, a yard measure, stockings to be darned, a ball of twine, a skein or two of silk, ends of ribbon, fragments and rags of cloth, lint for wounds, a box of goose fat for ointment, and many other articles indispensable for the complete housewife.

Jennifer Miller, Molly's mother, was indeed a homely body, low in stature, inclined to stoutness, somewhat short of breath, and in appearance exactly what she was in fact, namely, a woman whose whole delight and study was in housewifery. When she was young I have heard that she possessed some share of beauty, as a rosy cheek, red lips, bright eyes, and so forth. But her daughter took after

the father, who was a tall and proper man, as those testify who knew him.

His Lordship treated her with the respect due to a great lady, bowing as low to her as he had done to Molly.

'Madam, I come to congratulate you on the escape of your daughter. 'Twas providential.'

'With your help, sir. Oh! I know a gentleman's modesty. Well, sir—my Lord, I mean—we are humble folk, but I hope we know how to be grateful. I said to Molly this morning: "Look out," I said, "among your fine trinkets the very finest thing you've got, and take it yourself with your humble respects to his Lordship," and I would have sent with it some of my last year's ginger cordial to warm the stomach. I warrant it is poor stuff that they give you. Servants don't give their minds to cordials. But Molly wouldn't go. She was never one of your shy and shame-faced girls, neither. "Go and thank his honour, do," I said to her. "What will he think of your manners? Don't leave it to the Captain. Go yourself." That's what I said.'

'Indeed, madam, Miss Molly has already thanked me more than enough. I am most fortunate in being of some service to her.'

'John,' the good lady added, 'where are your manners, pray? His honour has nothing to drink. A glass of home-brewed, now, or a little of my ginger cordial? Unless you will take a bottle home with you. Or a glass of Lisbon? We are not so poor as to miss it.'

'Nothing, madam, nothing, I assure you.' So saying, his Lordship, with his most profound bow, quitted the room and the house.

His mind was now made up. There was no longer any doubt possible as to the girl's great fortune. He had satis-

fied himself in every particular. He knew the value of her fleet, and the income of her business. He now knew the value of her jewels. He would make the girl his wife, provided he could do it without the settlement of her fortune upon herself. There must be no settlement.

What he proposed to do with her after his marriage I do not know. Perhaps he would send her to his country house, from which he had already sold the furniture, the pictures, the books, and everything. It stood, I have been told, in a desert, which had once been a lovely wood. But the wood was felled, and only the stumps were left. There were gardens around, but they had gone to rack and ruin. The farmers, his tenants, paid their rent to the lawyers; his name was a by-word and a proverb in his own county for mad gambling, for raking, and ungodly living. I say that he might have proposed to take her to this deserted spot, and to leave her there. Or he might have taken her to London, there to associate with I know not what kind of women or what kind of men. It is certain, however, that no good woman and no honest man would consort with the wife of the Earl of Fylingdale. He walked away, however, his mind made up. He would marry the girl if he could get her without settlements. And as he thought of that treasury of precious stones, his unholy heart glowed within him.

Molly went back to the kitchen and resumed the making of the beefsteak pie.

'John,' said her mother, 'does that young man mean anything?'

'He gives me advice. He knows my design as regards Molly. He is a very virtuous young gentleman, as well as courageous.'

'John, do nothing hastily. He did not look at Molly in a way—well, I can remember—what I call a hungry

way. Take care, John. Perhaps he only wants her money.'

'Why, Jennifer, he is the most fastidious man in the world. Do you think he can be taken with Molly?'

'Try him. Offer him Molly without a farthing. He would turn away. I am sure he would, John. I know what a lover's looks should be. Offer him Molly with her fortune. Ah! then you shall see. John, do nothing rash. Remember, Molly is ignorant of gentlefolk and their ways. I've heard of their ways. Molly is like me: she will expect the whole of her husband, not a part of him.'

'Don't I tell the woman that he is a man of the nicest honour?'

'You say so. How do you know, John?'

'Did he not rescue the girl at the risk of his own life? Why, Jennifer, what more do you ask?'

'Ay. That he did. Perhaps he was not willing to let her fortune go to some other man. Molly is worth fighting for. Well, if he means something, why did he go on board the dirty ship with you—and he so fine? Why was he so anxious to know what the girl has in ships and things? Why did he ask to see her jewels if it was not to find out what they are worth? I tell you, John, I could see in his eyes what he was thinking about.'

'Ay, ay; trust a woman for seeing into a millstone.'

'He was thinking, "Is she worth it?" And he was calculating how it all mounted up. Oh! I saw it in his eyes. John, be very careful. If she is taken from us, let her go to a man who will make her happy and then I will bear it. But not among them that drink and gamble, and make a woman mad with jealousy and sick with fear. John, John, be very careful with that man.'

CHAPTER XXVI

THE LAST STEP BUT ONE

You shall now hear more of the cunning by which this noble and virtuous person—this adornment and boast of the peerage—laid his plans for securing the fortune and the hand of our Molly. He had persuaded the simple old sailor to believe anything he chose to advance; he had shown himself in the eyes of the girl that which women admire more than anything else in the world, fearless and skilled in fence and ready to fight; he had also shown himself ready to place his courage and his skill at the service and for the rescue of a woman. So far, everything was prepared and in readiness for the next step. But there were certain obstacles still in the way. These he proceeded to remove.

The Lady Anastasia, after the Morning Prayers, at which she was a regular attendant, generally returned to her lodging, where she sat with her maid engaged in the important affairs of the toilette until dinner.

This day, after his examination of the jewels, Lord Fylingdale was carried to Lady Anastasia's lodging in the Market Place.

The lady dismissed her maid.

'You have something to tell me, Ludovick,' she said. 'I cannot tell from your face whether you are going to deal

'I CANNOT TELL WHETHER YOU ARE GOING TO DEAL TRUTHFULLY.'

truthfully. I have had, as you know, a large experience of the other way. Now, what is it?'

'What I have come to say is important. Anastasia, in this matter I have given you my entire confidence. There have been, I own, occasions when I have been compelled—but all that is over. I now confide absolutely in you, and in you alone. My interests are yours.'

'You have already given me that assurance on other occasions.' She implied, perhaps, by these words that the assurance and the fact were not identical.

'What can I give you except my assurance?'

'Nothing, truly. But pray go on. I hear that you have been playing the part of knight errant and fighting for distressed damsels. I laughed when I heard of it. You to fight on the side of the angels! Where are your wings, my Ludovick?'

'The thing happened exactly as I could have wished. The country bumpkin who carried her off had no knowledge of fence. He could only lunge, and he was half drunk. There was a great appearance of desperate fighting—because he was mad with drink and disappointment. I played with the fellow long enough to make a show of courage and danger. Then I pinked him.'

'Is he dead?'

'I believe that he is in some kind of fever. Perhaps he is by this time dead. What matters? Well, Anastasia, the result of the affair is that I have now arrived at perfect confidence on the part of my old friend the guardian.'

'And with the girl?'

'The girl matters nothing. The first part of the business is done. You can now go back to London.'

'Go back to London?' she repeated suspiciously.

'You have done all I wanted done here. You have given me a very good character; you have charmed the

people of the Spa; you have flattered the girl and inspired her with discontent. Why should you stay any longer?'

'To be sure, I am living at great expense, and the bank is in a poor way. But what are you going to do?'

'Anastasia'—he sat down and took her hand—'I have inquired carefully into the whole business. There is no doubt, none whatever, that the girl is far richer than even her guardian understands. She has a huge income—a great accumulation of money—and, what is more, a collection of jewels which is in itself a large fortune. Go back to London to-morrow or next day; then sit down and write a letter inviting the girl to stay at your house. Bid her bring with her all her jewels and finery. I, for my part, will urge the Captain to let her accept the invitation.'

'All this is very circumstantial. What then?'

'I will promise the Captain to find her a husband—a man of position, a man of rank, and, above all, one as virtuous as myself.' He said this without the least blush or even a smile.

'Where is that husband to be found?'

'As yet I do not know. He must be a creation of our own. He must not know; he must simply obey. We shall find such a person somewhere. I have, I believe, a good many of my former friends in the Fleet or the King's Bench. Now, Anastasia, to find one of these unfortunates; to offer him an allowance, say a guinea a week, in return for a power of attorney to administer the property. True, there are the creditors; but we might take over the detainers. He must not be suffered to get out.' He went on suggesting deceits and villainies.

'You said "we." What have I to do with the scheme? It is, you must confess, Ludovick, one of those arrangements or understandings which the world calls a conspiracy.'

Lord Fylingdale released her hand. Her words pained his sensitive soul. 'If at this time, after all that we have done together, we are to talk of conspiracies, we had better act separately,' he said coldly.

'No, I am your servant, as you know. Sometimes your most unhappy servant, but always at your command. Only now and then it pleases me to call things by their proper names. At such times, Ludovick, I look in my glass and I see, not the Lady Anastasia in a company of fashion, but a poor wretch sitting in a cart with her arms tied down, a white nightcap on her head and a prayer-book in her hand. There is a coffin in the cart.'

'Anastasia! You are ridiculous. What have we done that all the world would not do if it could? These scruples are absurd, and these visions are fantastic. What is your share? You know that half of mine—all that is mine—is yours as well. You shall have my hand and my name. These you should have had long ago had they been worth your picking up. Alas! Anastasia, no one knows better than you the desperate condition of my affairs.'

'Well, I will obey you. I will go back to town. I will go to-morrow. The other partners in our innocency—they will also go back, I suppose.'

'They will have done their part—Sir Harry and the Colonel and the parson—they will all go back. They cost a great deal to keep, and they have done their work.'

'Should I see the girl before I go?'

'Perhaps not. Write to her from London. Invite her to stay with you. For my own part, I will look about me for the man we want. A prisoner—on the poor side—a gentleman; one who will do anything for a guinea a week. The girl will not know that he is a prisoner—it will be quite easy——'

This he said, concealing his real intentions, and only

anxious to get this lady out of the way. But he left her suspicious and jealous. That is to say, she had already become both, and this intricate plot of getting a husband from the Fleet, and the rest of it, made her still more suspicious and jealous.

At the 'Crown' Lord Fylingdale found Colonel Lanyon waiting for him.

'I have inquired, my Lord, after Tom Rising. He is in a fever this morning.'

'Will he die? What do they think?'

'Perhaps. But he is young. They think that he will recover. What are your Lordship's commands?'

'We have stayed here long enough, Colonel.'

'With submission, my Lord. Although business has been very bad, it would be as well to wait for the event in Tom Rising's case. My position is very secure if he recovers. The gentlemen of the company have acknowledged that he forced high play upon me; they are unanimous in that respect. It means over a thousand pounds. If he recovers he must pay the money.'

'Yes. In that case it may be best to wait. If he dies——'

'Then, my Lord, we know not what his heirs and executors may resolve upon. The feeling concerning debts of honour is, however, very strong among the gentlemen of Norfolk. I am sorry that they are not richer.'

'If the man dies you can refer to me, perhaps, as arbitrator with the executors. Meantime, make the best of your opportunities and lose no more money. Lady Anastasia goes home in a few days, perhaps to-morrow.'

The man retired. Lord Fylingdale sat down and reflected. The great thing was to get Lady Anastasia out of the way; the rest might stay or not, as they pleased. Yet he would warn them that their departure would not

be delayed long. He took pen and paper and wrote to Sir Harry.

'DEAR BEAU,

'I think that the air of Lynn after a few weeks is not wholesome for one no longer in his first youth. I would therefore advise that you should think about going back to town. Settle immediately your affairs, gaming and others. Leave the hearts you have broken and return to mend those which are only cracked. In a word, the ladies of London are calling loudly for your return, and the wits and pretty fellows are asking what has become of Sir Harry.

'Your obedient servant to command,

'FYLINGDALE.'

There remained the parson and the poet. The latter he could send away at a day's notice; the former he would probably want for a certain purpose. He sent for Mr. Semple, his secretary.

'Semple,' he said, 'I have now made inquiry into the truth of your statements—I mean as regards this young lady's fortune.'

'It is as I told your Lordship?'

'It is. The fortune you have exaggerated, but it is no doubt considerable. Well, I have sent for you in order to tell you that I am now resolved upon carrying out the project you submitted to me. My own affairs are, as you found out, embarrassed; the girl's fortune will be useful to me; her person is passable; her manners can be improved. I have therefore determined to make her my Countess.'

'My Lord, I rejoice to have been the humble instrument——'

'You have kept the secret, so far, I believe. At least I have seen no sign that anyone suspects my intentions. You have invented a lie of enormous audacity in order to bring us all together—myself, and certain friends of mine, to assist in various ways the project up my sleeve; your inventions have converted an ordinary well into a health-restoring spring; you have caused the elevation of this town of common sailors and traders and mechanics into a fashionable Spa. Semple, you are a very ingenious person. I hope that you are satisfied with your success.'

'Gratified, my Lord. Not satisfied.'

'I understand. You shall be satisfied very shortly by the fulfilment of my promise. It is, if I remember, to find you a place under Government worth at least £200 a year, with perquisites. You shall learn, Semple, that I can be grateful and that I can keep my word, written or spoken. Now there remains one more service.'

He proceeded to give him certain instructions.

'And, remember, the greatest secrecy is to be observed. Neither you nor the Captain is to reveal the fact—until the business is completed. Everything will be ruined if anything is revealed. Your own future depends upon your secrecy. You are sure that you have your instructions aright?'

'I am quite sure, my Lord. I am your ambassador. I come with a message of great importance. There are reasons why the proceedings are to be kept secret. The lady will be made a Countess before a prying and impertinent world can be informed of your Lordship's intentions. I fly, my Lord. I fly.'

'One moment, friend Semple. Before you depart on this mission, resolve me as to a difficulty in my mind.'

'What is that, my Lord?'

'You are aware, of course, that my plan of life is not

quite what this girl looks for in a husband. She will expect, in fact, the bourgeois virtues—constancy, fidelity, early hours, regularity, piety. You know very well that she will find none of these virtues. They are not, I believe, expected in persons of my rank. You are preparing for the girl, in fact, a great disappointment, and perhaps a life of misery. If I did not want her money, I might pity her.'

Sam's face darkened.

'Tell me, my friend, in return for what acts of kindness done to you by the Captain or by Molly herself are you conferring this boon upon the girl?'

The poet made no reply for awhile. Then he answered, his eyes on the ground. 'The thing is as good as done. I may as well let you know. The Captain cudgelled me like a dog—like a dog. My gratitude is so great that I have succeeded in marrying his ward to—you, my Lord. What worse revenge could I take?'

'Frankly, I know of none. The devil himself, you see, can speak truth at times.'

'You will waste and dissipate the whole of her fortune, and would if it were ten times as great, in raking and gaming; you will send her back to her own people broken-hearted and ruined. That will be my doing.'

'Friend Semple,' said his Lordship, 'if I were not Fylingdale I would be Semple; and, to tell the truth, if I saw any other way of raising money I would—well, perhaps I would—even pity the girl and let her go.'

CHAPTER XXVII

THE EXPECTED BLOW

That evening the blow, feared and expected, fell, for then, and not till then, I felt that we had lost our maid.

I found the Captain sitting in the summer-house alone, without the usual solace of his tobacco and his October. 'Jack,' he said, with a gloomy sigh, 'I am now the happiest of men, because my Molly is the most fortunate of women. I have attained the utmost I could hope or ask. The most virtuous of men—I should say of noblemen—has asked the hand of our girl. Molly will be a Countess! Rejoice with me!'

I stood outside on the grass, having no words to say.

'She will marry him immediately. Nothing could be more happy or more fortunate. Such rank—such a position as places her on a level with the highest ladies of the land, though the daughter of plain folk, with a ship-owner for a father and a sailor's daughter for a mother. There is promotion for you, Jack!'

'She will go away, then, and leave us!'

'Ay; she will leave us, Jack. She will leave us. His Lordship—you do not ask who it is.'

'Who can it be, Captain, but Lord Fylingdale?'

'The best of men. He will carry her off to his country house, where they will live retired for awhile, yet in such

state as belongs to her rank. We shall lose her, of course. That, however, we always expected. The country house is in Gloucestershire, the other side of England. Perhaps she may get to see us, but I am seventy-five, or perhaps more, and Jennifer, her mother, is not far from fifty. I cannot look to set eyes on her again. What matter?' He hemmed bravely and sat upright. 'What matter, I say, so that the girl is happy? Her mother may, perhaps, set eyes on her once more; but she will be changed, because, you see, our Molly must now become a fine lady.'

'Yes,' I groaned, 'she must become a fine lady.'

'Jack, sometimes I am sorry that she has so much money. Yet, what was I to do? Could I waste and dissipate her money? Could I give away her ships? Could I give her, with the fortune of a princess, to a plain and simple skipper? No; Providence—Providence, Jack, hath so ordered things. I could not help myself.'

'No, Captain; you could not help things. Yet . . .' I broke off.

'Well, Jack, why don't you rejoice with me? Why the devil don't you laugh and sing? All you want is to see her happy, yet there you stand as glum and dumb as a mute at a funeral.'

'I wish her happiness, sir, with all my heart.'

'Sam Semple came here this afternoon, by order of my Lord. Sam gives himself airs now that he is a secretary and companion. He came and demanded a private conversation with me. It was quite private, he said, and of the utmost importance. So we sat in the parlour, and, with a bottle of wine between us, we talked over the business. First, he told me that his patron, as he calls him, meaning his master, had been greatly taken with the innocence and the beauty of Molly. I replied that, unless he was a stock, or a stone, or an iceberg, I expected

nothing less. He went on to say that, although a noble Earl with a long pedigree and a great estate, his patron was willing to contract marriage with a girl who was not even of gentle birth, and had nothing but her beauty and her innocence. I told him that she had, in addition, a very large fortune. He said that his patron scorned the thought of money, being already much more wealthy than most noblemen of his exalted rank; that he was willing, also, to pass over any defects in manners, conversation, and carriage, which would be remedied by a little acquaintance with the polite world. In a word, his Lordship offered his hand, his name, his title, his rank, and himself—to my ward.'

'His condescension,' I said, 'is beyond all praise.'

'I think so, too. Beyond all praise. I asked his advice touching a husband for my girl. He promises his assistance in the matter, and he then offers himself. Jack, could anything be more fortunate?'

'I hope it may turn out so. What does Molly say?'

'You may go in and ask her yourself. She will tell you more than she will tell anybody else. The matter is to be kept, for the present, a profound secret between his Lordship and ourselves. But since Sam Semple knows it, and Jennifer knows it, and you are one of ourselves, therefore, you may as well know it, too. But don't talk about it.'

'Why should it be kept a secret? Why should it not be proclaimed everywhere?'

'My Lord says that the place is a hot-bed of scandal; that he would not have Molly's name passed about in the Pump Room, to be the object of common gossip and inventions, made up of envy and malice. He would spare Molly this. When she is once married and taken away from the place they may say what they please. Whatever they say, they cannot do her any harm. Why, some of

them even declared that she was one of the company of strolling actresses. There is nothing that they will not say.'

I made no reply, because it certainly did seem as if in asking for secrecy his Lordship had acted in Molly's interests.

'Well, Captain, we must make the best of it. You must find your own happiness in thinking of Molly's.'

'What aggravates me, Jack, is the ridiculous behaviour of my cousin Jennifer. She is in the kitchen crying, and the black woman with her. Go and comfort her before you see Molly.'

I looked into the kitchen. Molly's mother sat in the great wooden chair beside the fireplace. She held her apron in her hands as if she had just pulled it off her face, and the tears were on her cheeks. When she saw me they began to flow again. 'Jack,' she said, 'have you heard the news? Has the Captain told you? The worst has happened. I have lost my girl. She is to be married; she will go away; she will marry a man who scorns her guardian and despises her mother. A bad beginning, Jack. No good can come of such a marriage. A bad beginning. Oh! I foresee unhappiness. How can Molly become a fine lady? She is but a simple girl—my own daughter. I have made her a good housewife, and all her knowledge will be thrown away and lost. It is a bad business, Jack. Nigra has been telling her fortune. There is nothing hopeful. All the cards are threatening. And the magpies—and the screech owl——'

She fell to weeping again. After which she broke out anew: 'The Captain says he is the most virtuous man in the world. It isn't true. If ever I saw the inside of a man in my life, I have seen the inside of that man. He is corrupt within, corrupt through and through——'

'Consider,' I said. 'All the world is crying up his noble conduct and his many virtues.'

'They may say what they like. It is false; he is heartless; he is cold; he is selfish. He marries Molly for her money. Persuade the Captain, if you can. He will not believe me.'

'How can I persuade him? I have no knowledge. Are they all in a tale? Are you the only person who knows the truth? How do you know it?'

'I know it because I love my girl, and so I can read the very soul of a man. I have read your soul, Jack, over and over again. You are true and faithful. You would love her and cherish her. But this man? He knows not what love means, nor fidelity, nor anything. Go, Jack. There is no help in you or in any other. Because there is none other——' She spoke the words of the Prayer-Book. '"None other that fighteth for us, but only Thou, O God. Only Thou, O God!"'

She covered her face again with her apron and fell to sobbing afresh.

So I went into the parlour where Molly was sitting.

'Jack!' she jumped up. 'Oh, Jack, I want you so badly!'

'I know all, Molly. Except what you yourself say and think about it.'

She had a piece of work in her hands, and she began to pull it and pick it as she replied. For the first time in my life I found Molly uncertain and hesitating.

'The Captain says that it is the greatest honour that was ever offered to any woman, to be raised from a lowly condition to a high rank—and all for love.'

'All for love?' I asked.

'Why, what else can it be that made him fight for me with that desperate villain? He risked his life. Whatever happens, Jack, I cannot forget that.'

'No. It was doubtless a great thing to do. Has he told you himself that it was all for love?'

'He has not spoken about love at all. He has never once been alone with me. It seems that these great people make love by message. He sent a message by Sam Semple.'

'A very fine messenger of Cupid, truly!'

'Offering marriage. The Captain cannot contain his satisfaction and sits glum. My mother says she will never be able to see me again and begins to cry.'

'Well—but, Molly, to be sure it is a great thing to become a Countess. Most women would jump at the chance, under any conditions. Do you, however, think that you can love the man?'

'He hasn't asked for love. Oh, Jack, to think that people should marry each other without a word of love! If he loves me I suppose he thinks that I am bound to give him love in return.'

'There, again, Molly, do you love the man?'

'Jack, nobody knows me better than you. What reply can I make?'

'He is too cold and too proud for you, Molly. How can you love him? Perhaps,' I added, because I was very sure that she would marry him, 'after marriage you will find that his coldness in only a cloak to hide his natural warmth, and that his pride covers his wife as well as himself.'

'He is a good man. Everybody says so. Lady Anastasia declares that he is the most honourable and high-principled of men. On that point I am safe. And think, Jack, what a point it is! Why, to marry a drunkard, a sot, a profligate, a gambler—one would sooner die at once and so end all. But I can trust myself with him. I have no fear of such treatment as drives some wives to distrac-

tion. Yet he is cold in his manner and proud in his speech. I might find it in my heart to love him if I was not afraid of him.' And so she went backwards and forwards. He was so good and so great; his wife must always respect him. He was of rank so exalted—it was a great honour to become his wife. He was so brave—she owed her rescue to his bravery. Yet he had spoken no word of love: nor had she seen any sign of love. I asked her what sign she expected, and she was confused. 'Of course,' she said, 'every girl knows very well when a man is in love with her.' 'How does she know?' I asked her. 'She knows, because she knows,' I suppose she felt the man was not in love with her just as her mother felt that his character for virtue and nobility was assumed—'corrupt within,' the mother said. Women are made so. And in the next breath Molly repeated that what his Lordship had done was done for love. 'How do you know?' I asked again. 'Because the Captain says so,' she replied, with unconscious inconsistency.

'Is the courtship to be conducted entirely by messenger?'

'No; he will come to-morrow morning and see me. I am to give him an answer then. But the Captain has already told him what the answer is to be. Oh, Jack, I am so happy! I am so fortunate that I ought to be happy. Yet I am so down-hearted about it. Going away is a dreadful thing. And when shall I see any of you, I wonder, again? Oh, I am so fortunate! I am so happy.' And to show her happiness she dropped a tear, and more tears followed.

What kind of happiness, what kind of good fortune was that which could fill the mind of the Captain with gloom and could dissolve Molly's mother in tears, and could herald its approach to the bride by sadness which weighed her down? And as for me, you may believe that my

heart was like a lump of lead within me, partly because I was losing the girl I loved, but had never hoped to marry, and partly because from the outset of the whole affair—yes, from the very evening when the news of the grand discovery was read to the 'Society of Lynn'—I had looked forward to coming events with foreboding of the most dismal kind.

'Come to see me to-morrow afternoon, Jack,' she said. 'I must talk about it to someone. With the Captain I cannot talk, because he is all for the unequal match; and with my mother I cannot talk, because she foretells trouble, and will acknowledge no good thing at all in the man or in the match. Do not forget, Jack. Come to-morrow. I don't know how many days are left to me when I can ask you to come. Oh, Jack, to leave everybody—all my friends—it is hard! But I am the most ungrateful of women, because I am the happiest—the happiest. Oh, Jack, the happiest and most fortunate woman that ever lived.'

CHAPTER XXVIII

WARNING

In the evening, which was Wednesday, I repaired to the Gardens, paying for my admission, but no longer in the character of a fine gentleman. Lord Fylingdale was not present, nor Molly. Lady Anastasia was there, gracious and smiling as usual. Nothing was said about her approaching departure. After walking round the Long Room she retired to the Card Room, and play began as usual. It seemed to me, looking on with a few others at the door, that there was a kind of awkwardness or constraint among the company. They collected together in small groups, which whispered to each other; then these groups melted away, forming new companies, which in their turn dissolved. Something of importance had happened. Presently some of the gentlemen in the Card Room came out. They, in their turn, became surrounded and formed into another group who whispered eagerly with each other. They were standing near the door, and I overheard some of their discourse. 'I am assured,' one of them was saying, 'that he has been ordered out of the Assembly at Bath for foul play at cards, and I have it on the best authority that he was driven off the Heath at Newmarket.' I did not know of whom he was speaking.

'Truly,' said another, 'we seem to have fallen into the

midst of a very pretty set of sharpers. Will Tom Rising, if he gets the better of his wound, have to pay that debt?'

'I think not. A debt of honour can only be contracted with a man of honour.'

'On the other hand, sir, if Tom had won, he would have looked for payment.'

'Why, sir, that is true. But observe, when we played with the Colonel we took him for a man of honour. Some of us have won a few guineas of him. Should we return them? No. And why? Because we accepted him as a man of honour, and stood to win or lose as between gentlemen. Now, one does not play with a sharper knowingly.'

'One would not take his money; one would not pay him if one lost.'

'Then Tom must not pay.'

'If what we hear is true; if the man has been exposed at Bath, if he has been warned off the Heath at Newmarket, most assuredly Tom must not pay a farthing.'

'At present the fever is still upon him. Well, but we must wait. All this may be mere rumour.'

'It may be, as you say; but I think not. The report comes from Houghton, Sir Robert's place, where a certain cousin of Tom Rising, member of Parliament, I think, for Ipswich, is now staying as a guest. Houghton is only a few miles from Lynn. It lies in the Marshland. This gentleman, then, heard of the duel and the wound, and has been to see his cousin.'

'Is he still in the town? Can one have speech with him?'

'I think not. He has gone back to Houghton. But he will return. I am informed that he inquired into the whole particulars; that he learned of his cousin's heavy losses at play to one Colonel Lanyon. "Lanyon?" says my Parliament man. "I know that name—Colonel Lanyon?

Why, the fellow ought not to show his face among gentlemen," and then out came the whole story.'

'Still,' said the other, 'he may be mistaken.'

'Men are not often mistaken in such matters. But, sir, I can tell you more. There are gentlemen in Sir Robert's party, at Houghton, who profess to know strange things about others of our visitors from London. I will mention no names, yet there will be a surprise for some who pretend to be what they are not. I say no more, except to advise you not to neglect next Friday's Assembly. Meantime, silence; let us say nothing.'

The little group broke up. I paid small attention to the words. The Colonel was quite unknown to me, except as a constant attendant in the Card Room. But I observed that the whispering went on, and increased, and that every man in every group presently went away and formed other groups, and that more communications were made and more discussions followed, and that on everyone was enjoined a promise of the greatest secrecy.

Also I observed that every group contained the same varieties of listeners. There was the open-mouthed man, who gaped with wonder; the wise man after the event, who had always entertained suspicions; the indignant man, who was for immediate measures; the slow man, who would wait; and the critical man, who wanted evidence and proof. I dare say there were more.

Such whisperings and such groups do not create cheerfulness in a company. Suspicion and jealousy were in the air that night; the music played and the fiddlers scraped; the singers squalled; the people walked round and round, after their usual fashion; there was plenty of conversation and of animation; they were excited; they were evidently looking forward to some important event; but they were not laughing, nor paying compliments, nor talking

of dress, nor were they listening to the music or the singers.

And a very curious circumstance happened in the Card Room. There was at first the usual crowd of players sitting and standing; the usual staking of guineas, and laying and taking odds; it was, in fact, an ordinary evening, when the company pressed round the table and the game went on merrily. Then one or two people came in from the Long Room. There were whispers; two or three left their places and retired from the room. Other people came in from the Long Room; there were more whispers; more players gave up their seats and left the room. After a while there was no one left in the Card Room at all except Lady Anastasia, Sir Harry Malyns, and Colonel Lanyon. The croupier still stood at the head of the table, rake in hand, crying the main and proclaiming the odds. Seeing no one else at the table, the two players desisted.

'What does it mean?' asked the lady, looking round. 'We are deserted.'

'I know not,' Sir Harry replied. 'Some distraction in the Gardens; probably a quarrel; one of the bumpkins has perhaps struck another.'

He went out to inquire, but came back immediately. 'There is no distraction,' he said. 'Nothing has happened; the people are walking round as usual.'

'Something, surely,' said the lady, 'must have happened. Why are the tables deserted? Such a thing has never occurred before. Colonel, will you kindly find out what it means? I have the vapours to-night, I think. My mind misgives me.'

Colonel Lanyon rose and walked to the door. He looked up and down the Long Room and returned. 'Nothing has happened,' he said. 'They are all strangers to me.

But since there is no more play I will e'en betake me to the tavern.'

'And I,' said the lady, 'will go home. Sir Harry, please call my fellows.'

Sir Harry led her through the Long Room to the door. As she got into the chair, she said, 'Sir Harry, there is something brewing. I caught looks of hostility as we passed through the room. Do you think it is the jealousy of the women about that girl with the diamonds?'

'I observed no hostile looks.'

'Men never see such things. I tell you I not only saw them, but I felt them. We have given these people mortal offence. They are gentlefolk. We come among them, and we admit to our society a girl who has no pretence to gentility. Lord Fylingdale dances with her; I take her to the Assembly. Lord Fylingdale actually follows her when she is carried off and fights for her and rescues her. This is a thing which he might do for any of those ladies, and with no more than customary jealousies; but with such a girl it makes bad blood.'

'Hostile looks mean nothing. What if there is bad blood?'

'Sir Harry—Sir Harry—it is only in London, and not always there, that we account ourselves free from revenge. It is a revengeful world, and there are many people in it who would willingly put you and me and the Colonel, not to speak of the parson and the Earl himself, in the pillory, and pelt us with rotten eggs and dead cats.'

So she got into her chair, and the old beau, shaking his head, entered another chair and was carried home. But Colonel Lanyon, who walked to the tavern where his friends met at night, found the place, to his astonishment, empty. Then he, too, remembered appearances of hostility or resentment, notably the desertion of the players, and

the cold looks as he left the place. Now, as the worthy adventurer and sharper was by no means conscious of innocence, he began to feel uneasy. To such men as these who live by their wits there is always the danger that some past scandal may be revived, some former half-forgotten villainy remembered.

Therefore he became disquieted. He had some reason for disquiet, for, to begin with, he had done very well. Tom Rising would recover, it was thought. He would recover in a week or two, or more. He would then, as a man of honour, have to raise, by hook or by crook, the sum of £1,200, of which, by the compact, one-fourth was to be the Colonel's and three-fourths were the Earl's. This is a large sum of money to win or lose. Now, if anything inopportune was to occur, such as the revival of an old scandal—say that of Bath, or that of Tunbridge Wells, or that of Newmarket—these winnings would be in a dangerous situation.

A gentleman who lives by his wits, although he may be a good swordsman and a good shot with a pistol, cannot escape the consequences of a scandal. The thing follows him from place to place. It gets into taverns and hangs about gaming-houses; it stands between him and his prey; it snatches the young and inexperienced player from his grasp; it even prevents the payment of the debts commonly called debts of honour. Now, the Colonel had been about town and in the haunts of gamesters for a good score of years, and, truth to tell, he now found it difficult, anywhere, to be received into the company of gentlemen.

While he sat in the empty room one of the gentlemen, its frequenters, came in. The Colonel looked up.

'Why, sir,' he said, 'where is the company this evening?'

'There will be no company to-night, Colonel.'

'Ay—ay? No company? Where are they all, then?'

'To be frank with you, Colonel Lanyon, I am deputed to inform you that certain things are rumoured about you which must be explained.'

'Certain things, sir?' The Colonel sprang to his feet. 'To be explained? This is a very ugly word. To be explained? The word, sir, attacks my honour.'

'It does so, Colonel. You are quite right.'

'Then, sir, you and your friends will have to fight me.'

'We will willingly fight with—a man of honour. Not only that, but where a man of honour is concerned we should be most willing to offer an apology, if we have attacked his honour. To be brief, Colonel, certain things have been said concerning you and your honour. They have been alleged behind your back.'

'Well, sir, suppose my assailant meets me face to face. Gad, sir, he shall meet me on the grass.'

'Softly, softly, Colonel. There will be no fighting, I assure you. As for anything else, that depends on yourself. Frankly, Colonel, they are very nasty things. On the other hand, I assure you that, as we have received you without suspicion, we shall stand by you loyally.'

'In that case we need not talk of explanations.'

'Loyally, I say, unless the explanations are not forthcoming.'

'Give me the statements or the charges.'

'I cannot, Colonel. They are at present vague. But I am instructed to invite you to be present in the Card Room on Friday evening next, when an opportunity will be afforded you of hearing what has been stated and of replying. Colonel, we have found you very good company. We all desire to retain you as a friend.'

'But sir, permit me. This is monstrous. You tell me of charges, you avoid my society, you refuse to tell me the

nature of the charges, and you call upon me to reply on the spot without knowing——'

'Your reply will be quite easy. It really means either yes or no. And if, as I doubt not, you can disprove whatever is alleged, you will yourself entirely approve of our action in separating for a time from a man accused of things dishonourable, of giving him an opportunity of reply. Also you will thank me for my warning.'

'Why, sir, if to be grateful for such a warning and for such general charges is a duty, I will be grateful. Meantime——'

'Meantime, Colonel, you know your past life better than anyone. If there is in it anything of which you are ashamed, let me recommend you to present that affair in as favourable a light as possible. Men will quarrel over cards. Accusations are easily made. The duel next morning does not clear away suspicion. If, however, there is nothing, as I hope, come with a light heart and cheerful countenance, and we shall rally round you as brothers and men of honour. I wish you good-night, Colonel Lanyon, until Friday, after which I hope to sit here beside you, the bowl of punch on the table, and your songs and stories to keep us awake, till we sit down again to the cards.'

CHAPTER XXIX

THE ARDENT LOVER

Between ten and eleven of the clock next morning, Molly's suitor—I cannot call him her lover—arrived at the house. At that hour most of the ladies are at morning prayers, and the gentlemen are either at the tavern taking their morning whet, or at the coffee-house in conversation, or engaged in some of the sports to which most of them are so much addicted. Lord Fylingdale, although the streets at such an hour are mostly deserted, had to cross the Market Place on his way to the Captain's house, in Hogman's Lane, and was, therefore, carried in a chair with the curtains drawn so as to avoid recognition.

He was received by Captain Crowle in the parlour. For the occasion the old man had put on his Sunday suit, with white silk stockings; and he wore his sword, to which, as the former commander of a ship, he was entitled.

'I am come, Captain, to receive in person your answer to the message conveyed to you yesterday by my ambassador. I hope that the message was delivered faithfully, and with due respect?'

'I believe, my Lord, with both.'

'I assure you, Captain Crowle, that the respect I have conceived for your character and loyalty is more than I can express in words. That you have inspired, in the mind of your ward, similar virtues I do not doubt, and

this confidence, believe me, has much to do with the offer of my hand to that young lady.'

'Your Lordship does me the greatest honour. My answer is that I accept in Molly's name, and joyfully.'

'I am delighted. This should be,' he added coldly, 'the happiest day of my life.'

'When we spread the news abroad, everybody in Lynn will feel that the greatest honour has been done to the town as well as to this house.'

'Sir, you over-rate my position. Still . . . however, we must keep the matter secret for a day or two yet. I engage you, Captain, to profound secrecy.'

'As long as you please, my Lord. The sooner I may speak of it the better I shall like it, for I am bursting with joy and satisfaction.'

'Patience, Captain, for a day or two.'

The Captain became serious, even melancholy. 'You will take her away, I suppose?'

'I fear I must. A married man generally takes away his wife, does he not?'

'You will take her to your country house, and to London. Well, I am old—I am seventy-five already. I cannot expect ever to see her again. Her mother, however, is not so old by thirty years. Perhaps your Lordship will at some time or other—we would not remind you of your lady's humble folk—allow her if she is within an easy journey to come here to see her mother.'

'Surely—surely, Captain. Could I be so hard-hearted as to refuse? Her mother certainly—or yourself. But not her old friends. Not the friends of her childhood, such as that young sailor man—nor the girls of the place.'

'I care not for them, so that I may comfort her poor mother with that promise. As for myself, who am I that

I should intrude upon her? Let me die happy in the knowledge that she is happy.'

'She shall be as happy as the day is long, Captain.'

'I doubt it not. As for Jack Pentecrosse, an old playfellow, he is like me. He loves her as if she was his sister, but he desires nothing but the knowledge of the girl's happiness.'

'I accept your assurance, Captain, that he will not endeavour to seek her or to visit her.'

'He will not. My Lord,' the Captain became very serious, 'I can promise you a well-conditioned, virtuous, modest, obedient, and dutiful wife. She will ask for nothing but a continuance of your Lordship's affection and consideration, in return for which she will be your willing servant as well as your wife.'

'Again, Captain, I doubt it not. Else I should not be here.'

'And when the day comes—when you pass the word, my Lord—the bells shall ring and the music shall play and all the town shall make holiday, and we will have such a feast and a merry-making that all the country round shall ring with it. My Lord, I am so happy!'

'But, Captain, I have not yet received the consent of the lady.'

'Be assured that you will have it, my Lord. But the girl is shy and hesitates, being, to say the truth, dazzled by the rank to which she is to be raised. A young maid's modesty will perhaps hinder such freedom of speech as you would naturally desire.'

'I hope, sir, that I am able to appreciate and value the virtue of modesty. All I ask of the young lady is her consent.'

'Of that you may be assured beforehand.'

'Then, Captain, as this is an occasion of some awkward-

ness and one which it is well to get through as quickly as possible——' Did one ever hear of such a lover? To wish 'to get through as quickly as possible' his first interview with his mistress! 'You will perhaps bring Miss Molly to me or take me to her.'

Molly, meanwhile, was in her bedroom, in a strange agitation, her colour coming and going; now pale, now blushing; for the first time in her life trembling and inclined to swoon. Even for a girl who loves a man it is an event of the greatest importance, and one never to be forgotten, when she consents to make him happy. But when she is in grievous doubt, torn by the consciousness that she does not love the man; that she is afraid of him; that she does not desire the change of rank which he offers; and that she would far rather remain among her own people—in such a case, I say, her trouble is great indeed. However, to do honour to the occasion, she, like the Captain, had assumed her Sunday attire. Her frock, to be sure, was not so fine as that in which she graced the Assembly, but it was passable. To my mind she looked more beautiful than in that splendid dress.

At her guardian's summons, she slowly descended the stairs. The kitchen door was open; she looked in as she passed. Her mother, instead of being busy over her housewifery, was sitting in her chair, her hands clasped, her eyes closed, her lips moving. She was praying for her daughter. Molly stepped in and kissed her. 'Mother,' she said, 'pray that it may turn out well. I must accept him. Yet I doubt. Oh, pray for me!'

'Because,' her mother murmured in reply, 'the Captain cannot help, and Jack cannot help; and there is none other that helpeth us but only Thou, O God!'

Then Molly turned the handle of the parlour door and entered.

'Miss Molly!' her gallant lover, splendid with his star and his fine clothes, took her hand, bowed low, and kissed her fingers.

'You would speak with me, my Lord?'

'Yesterday I sent a message to your guardian. I told him by my messenger that I was entirely overcome by the beauty and the charms and the virtues of his fair ward. And I offered, unworthy as I am, my hand and all that goes with it—my rank, and title, my possessions and myself.'

'The Captain told me of the message.'

'I have to-day received an answer from him. But although he is your guardian I would not presume to consider that answer as final. I must have your answer as well.'

'My Lord, I am but a humble and a homely person.'

'Nay, but lovely as Venus herself.'

'I know now, since all the company have come to Lynn, how homely and humble I am in the eyes of gentlefolk.'

'You will no longer be either homely or humble—when you are a Countess.'

'I fear that your friends among the great will make your Lordship ashamed of your choice.'

'My friends know me better than to suppose that I can be shamed by their opinion. But, indeed, they have only to see you for that opinion to be changed. Once seen by the world and all will envy and congratulate the happy possessor of so much beauty.'

'Then, are you satisfied that you are truly in love with me?'

'Satisfied?' He took her hand again and kissed it. 'How shall I satisfy you on this point? By what assurance? By what lover's vows?'

She glanced upwards, having spoken so far with hanging

head. Her eyes met his. Alas! they were cold and hard. There was no softening influence of love visible in those eyes; only resolution and purpose. His eyes were as cold as his forehead, as hard as his lips. Poor Molly! Poor Countess!

'Is it not, my Lord,' she asked, 'a mere passing fancy? You will be tired of me in a month; you will regret that you did not choose rather among the fine ladies who speak your language and follow your manners.'

'Molly, I am a man who does not encourage idle fancies and passing loves. You will find no change in me. As I am now, so I shall be always.'

She shivered. The prospect made her feel cold.

'Then, my Lord,' she said, 'I have nothing more to say. I shall not do justice to your rank, nor shall I bring to your House the dignity which you deserve. Such as I am, take me, if you will, or let me go, if you will.'

'Can you doubt, Molly? I will take you.' He hesitated; he took her hand again; he stooped and kissed her forehead. There was no passion in his kiss; no tenderness in his touch; no emotion in his voice. Such as he was then, such he would always be. And though the door was closed, Molly seemed to hear again the voice of her mother murmuring 'But only Thou, O God!'

Her lover drew the Captain's armchair and placed it at the open window which looked out into the garden, then filled with flowers, fragrant and beautiful, and melodious with the humming of many bees.

'Sit down, Molly, and let us talk.'

He did not sit down. He stood before her; he walked about the room; he played with the gold tassels of his sword.

'Molly, since we are to be married, we must be married at once.'

'I am your Lordship's servant.'

'As soon as possible. Are you ready?'

'Ready? I suppose I could be ready in a month or six weeks.'

'Why, what is there to do?'

'I have to get things—dresses, house-linen, all kinds of things.'

'My dear, you are not going to marry a cit. Everything that you want you can buy. There are plenty of shops. You want nothing but what you have—your wardrobe, your fine things, and your common things, and your jewels. You must not forget your jewels.'

'I thought that brides were always provided with things for the house. But if your Lordship has already the linen and the napery——'

'Good Lord! How should I know what I have? The thing is that you will need nothing.'

'Where will you take me?'

'I think, first of all, to my house in Gloucestershire. It is not fully furnished; the late possesser, my cousin, whom I succeeded, was, unfortunately, a gambler. He had to cut down his woods and to sell them; he even had to sell his furniture and pictures. But I can soon put the house in order fit for your reception.' It was he himself, and not his predecessor, who had sold these things. 'If it is not so fine, at first, as you would wish, we can soon make it worthy of you.'

I have often wondered what he intended to do with his bride if things had gone differently. I am now certain that he intended to take her to this great country house, which, as I have understood, stands in a secluded part of the country, with no near neighbours and no town within reach; and that he intended to leave her there while he himself went up to London to resume the old gaming and

raking, which he desired so much, although they had been his ruin. Fate, however, prevented this design.

'If you desire my happiness, my Lord——'

'What else is there in the whole world that I should desire?'

'You will take me to that country place and live there. I fear the world of fashion and I have no wish to live in London. I have learned from the Lady Anastasia how the great ladies pass their time.'

'Everything shall be as you wish, Molly. Everything, believe me.'

He then, by way of illustrating this assurance, proposed a thing which he himself wished.

'We must be married immediately, Molly, because I am called away by affairs of importance to Gloucestershire. I ought to leave this place not later than Saturday.' The day was Thursday.

'Saturday? We must be married on Saturday?'

'Sooner than Saturday. To-morrow. That will give us time enough to make what little preparations may be necessary.'

'To-morrow? But we cannot be married so soon.'

'Everything is prepared. I have the license. We can be married to-morrow.'

'Oh!' It was all she could say.

'There is another thing. Your guardian would like to make a public ceremony of the wedding; he would hang the town with flags, and ring the bells, and summon the band of the marrowbones and cleavers, while all the world looked on.'

'Yes. He is so proud of the marriage that he would like to celebrate it.'

'And you, Molly?'

'I should like to be married with no one to look on,

and no one to know anything about it until it was all over.'

'Why—there, Molly—there, we are agreed. I was in great fear that you would not think with me. My dear, if there is one thing which I abhor, it is the public ceremony and the private feasting and merriment with which a wedding is accompanied. We do not want the town to be all agog; we do not want to set all tongues wagging; nor do we want to be a show with a grand triumphal march and a feast to last three days afterwards.'

'Can we be private, then?'

'Certainly. I can arrange everything. Now, Molly, my plan is this. We will be married privately in St. Nicholas Church at six in the morning, before the company are out of their beds. No one will see us; after the marriage you will come back here; I will return with you, and we will then inform the Captain and your mother of the joyful news. Believe me, when they come to think it over, they will rejoice to be spared the trouble and the preparation for a wedding-feast.'

'But I cannot deceive the Captain.'

'There is no deception. He has agreed to the match. He knows that you have agreed. There is one consideration, Molly, which makes a private marriage necessary. I could not consent to a public wedding or to a wedding feast, because my rank forbids. It would be impossible for me to invite any person of my own position to such a feast, and it would be impossible for me to sit down with those persons—worthy, no doubt, and honest—whom the Captain would certainly wish to invite.'

This was certainly reasonable, and certainly true. Rank must be respected, and a noble Earl cannot sit down to feast with merchants, skippers, mates, parsons, and the like.

'Then it shall be as your Lordship pleases.'

'Be at the church at six,' he said. 'I will provide everything and see that everything is ready for you. Do not be recognised as you pass along the street. You can wear a domino with the pink silk cloak which you wore the other night at the Assembly. Then I shall recognise you. No one else, Molly, need be considered. Are you sure that you understand?'

'Yes,' she sighed. 'I understand.'

'Then, Molly——' he bowed low, and, without offering to kiss her, this wonderful lover left his mistress and was carried home in his chair.

CHAPTER XXX

THE SECRET

All these things were told me by Molly herself in the afternoon. You may very well believe that my heart was sick and sore to think of Molly being thus thrown away as a bribe of rank and position upon a man who seemed to be of marble or of ice. For of one thing concerning women I am very certain, that to make them happy they must be loved. At the time I could not know, nor did I suspect, that this noble Earl was marrying Molly for her fortune. Like the Captain, I pictured him as one lifted above the common lot and apart from all temptations as regards money, by his own great possessions. Why, he had nothing—nothing at all. So much I know—he had wasted and dissipated the whole. There was nothing left, and his marriage, especially the private and hurried manner of it, was designed wholly to give him the possession and control of Molly's riches.

'To-morrow, then, we lose you, Molly?'

'To-morrow, Jack. His lordship consents that whenever, if ever, I am within an easy journey of Lynn, I may come back to see my mother. But when will that be? Alas! I know not! Gloucestershire is on the other side of the country.'

'After all, Molly, there are many wives who thus go away with their husbands and never see their own folk

any more. They forget them; they find their happiness with the home and the children. Why, my dear, in a year or two, when you have grown accustomed to your state and the condition of a great lady, you will forget Lynn and the old friends.'

'Never, Jack, never! You might as well expect me to forget the days when we were children together and played about the Lady's Mount and on the walls, and rowed our dinghy in the river. Forget my own folks? Jack, am I a monster?'

'Nay, but, Molly, all I want is to see you happy. Remember us if you will, and remember that we are all, the Captain and your mother and your faithful black and myself, daily praying for your welfare.'

So we talked. It was agreed between us that a private wedding was, under the circumstances, much more convenient than a public one, with all the display and feasting in which Lord Fylingdale could not take part. I could not but think the business too much hurried and too secret. As for other reasons, especially the absence of any settlements which would protect the wife, I had no knowledge of such things, and therefore no suspicion.

I bade her farewell—the last time I should see her in private and converse with her as of old—and with tears, we kissed and parted. But there was no question of love or of disappointment. We were like brother and sister who were separated after growing up together. And so I kissed her and said no more than 'Oh, Molly! if you had no money, we should not lose you:' and she replied with a sigh and more tears, 'And if I had no money, Jack, I should not have to leave my own people and go among strangers who will not welcome me, or love me, or give me even their friendliness.'

I left her, and walked away. I was too downhearted to

stay ashore; I would go aboard and sit alone in the Captain's cabin. There is nothing so lonely as a ship without her crew. If a man in these days desires to become a hermit, he should take up his quarters in one of the old hulks that lie in every harbour, deserted even by the rats, who swim away when the provisions are all gone. It is lonely by day, and it is ghostly by night. For then the old ship is visited by the sailors who have sailed in her and have died in her. In every ship there have been many who die of disease or by accident, or fall overboard and are drowned. These are the visitors to the hulk at night. Every sailor knows this, and has seen them. I wanted to be alone, I say; therefore I thought I would go on board and stay there.

Now, on my way across the Market Place, there came running after me a man, who called me by name. 'Mr. Pentecrosse—Mr. Pentecrosse,' and, looking round, I saw that it was the Lady Anastasia's footman, in green and gold livery—a very fine person indeed, to look at, much finer than myself in my workaday clothes. 'Sir,' he said, 'my mistress, Lady Anastasia, desires speech with you. Will you kindly follow me to her lodging?'

I obeyed. What did the lady wish to say to me?

She was in her parlour, half dressed in what they call, I believe, a dishabille. She nodded to the footman, who closed the door and left us alone.

'Mr. Pentecrosse,' she said graciously, 'this is the second time I have sent for you. Yet I gave you permission to call upon me often. Is this the politeness of a sailor? Never mind; I forgive you, because Molly loves you and you love Molly.'

'Madam,' I replied, 'it is true that I love Molly, but I have no longer any right to love her except as one who would call himself, if he could, her brother.'

'So I wanted, Mr. Pentecrosse—may I say Jack?—to learn your sentiments about this affair. I am, of course, in the confidence of Lord Fylingdale. I believe that I know all his secrets—or, at least, as many as a man chooses to tell a woman. You men have all got your secret cupboards, and you lock the door and keep the key. Say, therefore, rather, most of my lord's secrets.'

'What affairs, madam, do you mean?' I remembered that the business of the betrothal was a secret. 'What affairs?'

'Why ask—the affair between his lordship and Molly, of course. Shall I prove to you that I know all about it?'

'You can do better, madam; you can tell me what the affair is.'

'Oh, Jack! you act very badly. Never, my dear young man, go upon the stage. Of course, you know Molly has no secrets from you. Listen, then. On the first night when Molly and you distinguished yourself in the minuet —never blush, Jack, a British sailor should always show that he knows no fear—Lord Fylingdale administered a public rebuke to the company for their rudeness. He showed thereby that he was already interested in the girl. He then paid attention to the old Captain, whose simplicity and honesty are charming. I need not point out to you, Jack, that the old man became like wax in his Lordship's hands. He even revealed his ambition of finding an alliance for the girl with some noble house or sprig of quality, attracted by the report of her fortune. He was also simple enough to imagine that any young nobleman, a younger son, who would take a girl for her money, would also be a miracle of virtue, and beyond all considerations of money. So far I am quite correct, I believe?'

'Your ladyship is quite correct, so far.' In fact, the Captain's ambitions were the common theme of ridicule in the Pump Room and in the Gardens.

'He then came to see me, and engaged me as an old friend and one fully acquainted with his qualities——'

'Virtues, you mean, madam.'

'Qualities, I said—to make myself a friend of the fair Molly. This I did. She showed me the amazing collection of jewels which she possesses, and I gave her advice on certain points. She came here and I taught her something of the fashions in dress, carriage, and behaviour. She is an apt pupil, but lacking in respect for the manners of the polite world. I then find my Lord entering into further confidential discourse with the Captain. He even went on board your ship, and was by you escorted over the whole vessel. He took so great an interest in everything that you were surprised, and at parting he drank a glass of wine to the health of the fair Molly.'

'Quite true.' I suppose that the Captain had told Molly, who told Lady Anastasia.

'Very well. You see that I know something. But there is a great deal more. At the next Assembly, where Molly went with me, having been dressed by my own maid in a better taste, and without the barbaric splendour of so many gold chains and precious stones, Lord Fylingdale took her out before all the ladies—the Norfolk ladies being more than commonly observant of pedigree and lineage—and danced the first minuet with her and the first of the country dances. What was this, I ask you, but an open proclamation to the world that he was in love with this girl—the daughter of a town full of sailors? So, at least, it was interpreted, I hear, by some of the company. Others, out of sheer jealousy and envy, would not so acknowledge the action.'

'It was not so interpreted by the Captain, nor by Molly herself.'

'Tut, tut' (she rapped my fingers smartly with her fan), 'what signifies their opinion? As if they know anything of the meaning of things, even when they are done in broad daylight, so to speak, and in presence of all the fashion in the place. Why, Jack, there was not a girl in the town who, if such an honour had been done to her, would not have gone home that evening to see in the looking-glass a coronet already on her head.

'And then came the conclusion. Oh, the beautiful conclusion! The romantic conclusion when that misguided young gentleman called Tom Rising endeavoured to carry her off. 'Twas a gallant attempt, and would have succeeded, I doubt not——'

'Madam, with submission—you know not Molly.'

'I know my own sex, Jack—and I know that a man is never liked the less for showing courage. However, Lord Fylingdale took the matter into his own hands, rode after her, fought the unlucky Tom and brought back the lady. I am still, I believe, correct.'

'You are quite correct, Madam, so far as I know.'

'The next day Lord Fylingdale called at the Captain's house to inquire after the lady's health. He saw the Captain; he saw the lady herself, who was none the worse, but rather much the better for the excitement of the adventure and the delightful sight of two gentlemen trying to kill each other for her sake. He also saw the lady's mother, who came out of the kitchen, her red arms white with dough and flour, to receive the noble lord. Her lively sallies only made him the more madly in love with the girl.'

How had she learned all this? I cannot tell. But ladies of wealth can always, I believe, find out things, and servants know what goes on.

Lady Anastasia continued her narrative. 'Next day my Lord sent his secretary, Mr. Semple, as an ambassador to the Captain. He was instructed to ask formally the hand of the Captain's ward in the name of his master. This he did, the Captain not being able to disguise his joy and pride at this most unexpected honour. Now, sir, you perceive that I do know the secrets of that young lady. This morning he has again visited the house, and he received the consent—no doubt it was with disguised joy—of the lady herself. And you have just come from her. She has told you of her fine lover and of her engagement.'

I made no reply.

'I will tell you more. My lord desires a private marriage and a marriage very soon. Ha! Do I surprise you?'

'Madam, I perceive that he has told you all. You are quite right. The wedding, as you know, is to be in St. Nicholas' Church to-morrow morning at six, before the better sort have left their beds. And in order not to be recognised by any of the people, Molly will wear a domino and her pink silk cloak.'

She nodded her head. And she hid her face with her fan, saying nothing for a space. When she spoke her voice was harsh.

'That is the arrangement. You have understood it perfectly. Well, Jack, it is a very pretty business, is it not? Here is a young man—only thirty, as yet—with a fine old title, an ancient name, and an ancient estate—who is bound by all the rules of his order to marry only within his own caste. He breaks all the rules; he marries a girl who is not even a gentlewoman; who belongs to the most homely folk possible. What kind of happiness do you think is likely to follow on such a marriage? You, who are not altogether a fool, though you are ignorant of the

ways of society, are the right man to marry Molly. She understands you and what you like, and how you think. Believe me, she can never be happy with this nobleman. Sailor man, you do not understand what it means to be a great man and a nobleman in this country. From his infancy the heir must have what he wants and must do as he pleases. No one is to check his fine flow of spirits; he must believe that the whole world is made for his amusement, and that everything in the world is made for him to devour and to destroy. When such a child becomes a man, what can you expect? He wants no friends, because friendships among people like yourself are based on mutual help, and he wants no help. Companions he must have; young men like himself. He need never do any kind of work. Consequently, his mind is never occupied. He has no serious pursuits; therefore, of simple amusements he soon tires. Can such a man be unselfish? Can such a man lead a quiet and domestic life? He will rake; he will gamble; he will drink; there is nothing else for him. These will form his life. If he now and then tosses a guinea to some poor wretch, it is counted as an act of the highest charity. The most virtuous of noblemen may also be the most profligate.'

'Is this what one is to think of Lord Fylingdale?'

'Think what you please, Jack. Should you, however, hear that the marriage was forbidden, what should you say?'

'Forbidden? The marriage forbidden? But how? Why? It is to take place to-morrow.'

'I don't know. Answer my question.'

'Madam, I cannot answer it. If it is true that Lord Fylingdale is the kind of gentleman whose character you have drawn, there is nothing I should more rejoice to see. If, however——'

'You may go, Jack. You may go. I dare say something is going to happen to-morrow, at six in the morning, at St. Nicholas' Church. Yes, something will probably happen. The bride will be recognised by her black domino and her pink silk cloak. Thank you, Jack. You are a very simple young man; as simple as you are honest, and a woman can turn you round her finger.'

I went away wondering. I did not understand, being, as she said, so simple, that I had myself actually given her the information that she desired. I have since learned that the passion of jealousy and nothing else filled her soul and inspired all this reading of Lord Fylingdale's actions. In his conduct at the Assembly she saw the beginning of his passion; his own explanation that he wanted to get her money only made her more jealous, because, although she fully believed that statement, she saw no way of getting at the fortune without marrying the girl. As for his visits to the house, I suppose that she simply caused him to be watched and followed, while her maid, who played the spy for her, could from a certain point in the road look into the parlour when the window was thrown open. It was easy for such a jealous woman to surmise the truth; to jump at the conclusion that, in spite of all his protestations, Lord Fylingdale had come to the conclusion that he must marry the girl; that his rescue made her grateful and filled her with admiration for his courage; that he sent his secretary to open the business, and that he followed up this message by a formal visit from himself, when he placed the lady in a chair at the window and bent over her and kissed her hand.

This was not all. When he told Lady Anastasia that he had no further occasion for her services, and that she had better go back to London, all her jealousy flared up. She thus divined, at once, that she was to be sent

out of the way, so that when she next met him some of the business might have blown over and she herself might be less indignant at his treatment of her.

However, something, she said, was going to happen. What would happen? For my own part, I was restless and uneasy. What would happen? Had I known more about the wrath of a jealous woman I should have been more uneasy. Something was going to happen; could I go to the Captain and warn him as to the character of the lover? Why, I knew nothing. All that talk about the heir to rank and riches meant nothing except to show the dangers of such a position. A man so born, so brought up, must of necessity be more tempted than other men in the direction of selfishness, indulgence, luxury, laziness, and want of consideration for others. It is surely a great misfortune to be born rich, if one would only think so. The common lot is best, with the necessity of work. All Molly's misfortunes came from that money of hers. Her father very wisely concealed from his wife the full extent of his wealth, so that she remained in her homely ways, and the Captain also concealed from Molly until she grew up the nature of her fortune. Why could he not conceal it altogether from the world? Then—but it is useless to think what would have happened. Most of our lives are made up with mending the troubles made by our own sins or our own follies. Poor Molly was about to suffer for her father's sin in having so much worldly wealth.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE 'SOCIETY' AGAIN

THE 'Society' continued to meet, but irregularly, during this period of excitement when everybody was busy making money out of the company, or joining in the amusements, or looking on. The coffee-house attracted some of the members; the tavern others; the Gardens or the Long Room others. It must be confessed that the irregularities of attendance and the absences and the many new topics of discourse caused the evenings to be much more animated than of old, when there would be long periods of silence, broken only by some reference to the arrival or departure of a ship, the decease of a townsman, or the change in the weather.

This evening the meeting consisted, at first, of the Vicar and the master of the school only.

'We are the faithful remnant,' said the Vicar, taking his chair. 'The Mayor, no doubt, is at the coffee-house, the Alderman at the tavern, and the doctor in the Long Room. The Captain, I take it, is at the elbow of his noble friend.'

The master of the school hung up his hat and took his usual place. Then he put his hand into his pocket.

'I have this day received . . .'

At the same moment the Vicar put his hand into his pocket and began in the same words.

'I have this day received . . .'

Both stopped. 'I interrupted you, Mr. Pentecrosse,' said the Vicar.

'Nay, sir; after you.'

'Let us not stand on ceremony, Mr. Pentecrosse. What have you received?'

'I have received a letter from London.'

'Mine is from Cambridge. You were about to speak of your letter?'

'It concerns Sam Semple, once my pupil, now secretary to the Lord Fylingdale, who has his quarters overhead.'

'What does your correspondent tell you about Sam? That he is the equal of Mr. Pope and the superior to Mr. Addison, or that his verses are echoes—sound without sense—trash and pretence? Though they cost me a guinea.'

'The letter is a reply to one I addressed to my cousin, Zackary Pentecrosse, a bookseller in Little Britain. I asked him to tell me if he could learn something of the present position and reputation of Sam Semple, who gives himself, I understand, great airs at the coffee-house as a wit of the first standing and an authority in matters of taste. With your permission I will proceed to read aloud the portion which concerns our poet. Here is the passage:—

'"You ask me to tell you what I know of the poet Sam Semple. I do not know, it is true, all the wits and poets; but I know some, and they know others, so one can learn something about all those who frequent Dolly's and the Chapter House, and the other coffee-houses frequented by the poets. None of them, at first, knew or had heard of the name. At last one was found who had seen a volume bearing this name, and published by subscription. He said, 'twas the veriest trash; that a schoolboy should be trounced for writing such bad verses. 'But,' I asked him,

'he is said to be received and welcomed by the wits?' 'They must be,' he replied, 'the wits of Wapping, or the poets of Turnagain Lane. The man is not known anywhere.' So with this I had to be contented for a time. Then I came across one who knew this would-be poet. 'I was once myself,' he said, 'at my last guinea when I met Mr. Samuel Semple. He was in rags, and he was well-nigh starving. I gave him a sixpenny dinner in a cellar, where I myself was dining at the time. He told me that he had spent the money subscribed for his book, instead of paying the printer; that he was dunned and threatened for the debt; that if he was arrested he must go to the Fleet or to one of the Compters; that he must then go to the common side, and would starve. In a word, he was on his last legs. These things he told me with tears, for, indeed, cold and hunger—he had no lodging—had brought him low. After he had eaten his dinner and borrowed a shilling he went away, and I saw him no more for six months, when I met him in Covent Garden. He was now dressed in broad cloth, fat, and in good case. At first he refused to recognise his former companion in misery. But I persisted. He then told me that he had been so fortunate as to be of service to my Lord Fylingdale, into whose household he had entered. He, therefore, defied his creditors, and stood at bed and board at the house of his noble patron. Now, sir, it is very well known that any service rendered to this nobleman must be of a base and dishonourable nature. Such is the character of this most profligate of lords. A professed rake and a most notorious gambler. He is no longer admitted into the society of those of his own rank; he frequents hells where the play is high, but the players are doubtful. He is said to entertain decoys, one of whom is an old ruined gamester, named Sir Harry Malyns, and

another, a half-pay Captain, a bully and a sharper, who calls himself a Colonel. He is to be seen at the house of the Lady Anastasia, the most notorious woman in London, who every night keeps the bank at hazard for the profit of this noble lord and his confederates. It is in the service of such a man that Mr. Semple has found a refuge. What he fulfils in the way of duty I know not.' I give you, cousin, the words of my informant. I have since inquired of others, and I find confirmation everywhere of the notorious character of Lord Fylingdale and his companions. Nor can I understand what service a poet can render to a man of such a reputation living such a life."

'Do you follow, sir?' my father asked, laying down the letter, 'or shall I read it again?'

'Nay, the words are plain. But, Mr. Pentecrosse, they are serious words. They concern very deeply a certain lady whom we love. Lord Fylingdale has been with us for a month. He bears a character, here, at least, of the highest kind. It is reported, I know not with what truth, that he is actually to marry the Captain's ward, Molly. There is, however, no doubt that Molly's fortune has grown so large as to make her a match for anyone, however highly placed.'

'I fear that it is true.'

'Then what foundation has this gentleman for so scandalous a report?'

'Indeed, I do not know. My cousin, the bookseller, expressly says that he has no knowledge of Sam Semple.'

'Mr. Pentecrosse, I am uneasy. I hear that the gentlemen of the company are circulating ugly rumours about one Colonel Lanyon, who has been playing high and has won large sums—larger than any of the company can afford to lose. They have resolved to demand and await

explanations. There are whispers also which concern Lord Fylingdale as well. These things make one suspicious. Then I also have received a letter. It is in reply to one of my own addressed to an old friend at Cambridge. My questions referred to the great scholar and eminent divine who takes Greek for Hebrew.' Here is the reply :—

'"You ask me if I know anything about one Benjamin Purdon, Clerk in Holy Orders. There can hardly be two persons of that name, both in Holy Orders. The man whom I know by repute is a person of somewhat slight stature, his head bigger than befits his height. He hath a loud and hectoring voice; he assumes, to suit his own purposes, the possession of learning and piety. Of theological learning he has none, so far as I know. Of Greek Art, combined with modern manners, he is said to be a master. *Inglese Italianato Diavolo Incarnato* is the proverb. He was formerly tutor on the grand tour to the young Lord Fylingdale, whom he led into those ways of corruption and profligacy which have made that nobleman notorious. He is also the reputed author of certain ribald verses that pass from hand to hand among the baser sort of our University scholars. I have made inquiries about him, with these results. It is said that where Lord Fylingdale is found this worthy ecclesiastic is not far off. There was last year a scandal at Bath in which his name was mentioned freely. There was also—but this is enough for one letter!"'

The Vicar read parts of this letter twice over, so as to lend the words greater force. 'The man says publicly that he was tutor to Lord Fylingdale on the grand tour. I have myself heard him. On one occasion he proclaimed with loud voice the private virtues of his patron. Sir, I very much fear that we have discovered a nest of villains. Pray God we be not too late.'

'Amen,' said my father. 'But what can we do?'

'Ay, what can we do? To denounce Lord Fylingdale on this evidence would be impossible. To allow this marriage to take place without warning the Captain would be a most wicked thing.'

'Let us send for Jack,' said my father. 'The boy is only a simple sailor, but he loves the girl. He will now be aboard his ship.'

It is not far from the 'Crown' to the Quay, nor from the Quay to any of the ships in port. I was sitting in the cabin, melancholy enough, about eight o'clock or so, just before the sunset gun fired from the redoubt, when I heard a shout—'*Lady of Lynn*, ahoy!' You may be sure that I obeyed the summons with alacrity.

No one else had yet arrived at the 'Crown.' The Vicar laid down both letters before me. Then, as when one strikes a spark in the tinder and, the match flaming up, the darkness partly vanishes, so did the scheme of villainy unfold itself—not all at once—one does not at one glance comprehend a conspiracy so vile. But part, I say, I did understand.

'Sir,' I gasped. 'This is more opportune than you suspect. To-morrow morning—at six—at St. Nicholas' Church—they are to be married secretly. Oh! a gambler—a rake—one who has wasted his patrimony—to marry Molly, our Molly! Sir, you will interfere—you will do something? It is the villain Sam: he was always a liar—a cur—a villain.'

'Steady, boy, steady!' said my father. 'It helps not to call names.'

'It is partly revenge. He dared to make love to Molly three years ago. The Captain cudgelled him handsomely—and I was there to see. It is revenge in part. He hath brought down this noble lord to marry an heiress

knowing the misery he is preparing for her. Oh! Sam—if I had thee here!'

'Steady, boy,' said my father again.

'Who spread abroad the many virtues of this noble villain? Sam Semple—in his service—a most base and dishonourable service. Mr. Purdon, the man who writes ribald verses.' I thought of the Lady Anastasia, but refrained. She at least had nothing to do with this marriage. So far, however, there was much explained.

'What shall we do?'

'We must prevent the marriage of to-morrow. The Captain knows nothing of it. Lord Fylingdale persuaded Molly. He cannot marry her publicly because he says that he cannot join a wedding feast with people so much below him. Molly shall not keep that engagement, if I have to lock the door and keep the key.'

'Better than that, Jack,' said the Vicar. 'Take these two letters. Show them to Molly and ask her to wait while the Captain makes inquiries. If Lord Fylingdale is an honourable man he will court inquiry. If not, then we are well rid of a noble knave.'

I took the letters and ran across the empty Market Place. On my way I saw the Captain. He was walking towards the 'Crown' with hanging head. Let us first deal with him.

He did not observe me, being in gloomy meditation, but passed me by unnoticed, entered the 'Crown,' hung up his hat on its usual peg, and put his stick in its accustomed corner. Then he took his seat and looked round.

'I am glad,' he said, 'that there are none present except you two. My friends, I am heavy at heart.'

'So are we,' said the Vicar. 'But go on, Captain.'

'You have heard, perhaps, a rumour of what has been arranged?'

'There are rumours of many kinds. The place is full of rumours. It is rumoured that a certain Colonel Lanyon is a sharper. It is also rumoured that Sam Semple is a villain. It is further rumoured that the Reverend Benjamin Purdon is a disgrace to the cloth. And there is yet another rumour. What is your rumour, Captain?'

'Lord Fylingdale proposes to marry Molly. And I have accepted. And she has accepted. But it was to be a profound secret.'

'It is so profound a secret that the company at the Gardens this evening are talking about nothing else.'

The Captain groaned. 'I have received a letter,' he said. 'I do not believe it, but the contents are disquieting. There is no signature. Read it.'

The Vicar read it.

'Captain Crowle,

'Sir,—You are a very simple old man; you are so ignorant of London and of the fashionable world that you do not even know that Lord Fylingdale, to whom you are about to give your ward, is the most notorious gambler, rake, and profligate in the whole of that quarter where the people of fashion and of quality carry on their profligate lives. In the interests of innocence and virtue make some inquiry into the truth of this statement before laying your lovely ward in the arms of the villain who has come to Lynn with no other object than to secure her fortune.'

'It is an anonymous letter,' said the Vicar. 'But there is something to be said in support of it. From what source did you derive your belief in the virtues of this young nobleman?'

'From Sam Semple.'

'Who is in the service of his lordship. I know not what he does for him, but if he is turned out of that service he will infallibly be clapped into a debtor's prison.'

'There is also that grave and reverend divine——'

'The man Purdon. He is notorious for writing ribald verses, and for leading a life that is a disgrace to his profession.'

'There is also the Lady Anastasia.'

'I know nothing about her Ladyship, except that she keeps the bank, as they call it, every evening, and that the gaming table allures many to their destruction.'

'My friends,' said the Captain, 'what am I to do?'

'You must make inquiry. You must tell Lord Fylingdale that things have been brought to you; that you cannot believe them—if, as is possible, you do not; but that you must make inquiries before trusting your ward to his protection. You are her guardian, Captain.'

'I am more than her guardian; I love her better than if she was my own child.'

'We know you do, Captain. Therefore, write a letter to him instantly. There is yet time to prevent the marriage. Tell him these things. Say that you must have time to make these inquiries. I will help you with the letter. And tell him, as well, that you must have time to draw up settlements. If he is honest, he will consent to this investigation into his private character. If he wants Molly, and not her money-bag, he will at once agree to the settlement of her fortune upon herself.'

'I am an old fool, I suppose,' said the Captain. 'I have believed everything and everybody. Yet I cannot—no, my friends, I cannot think that this man, so proud, so brave, who risked his life for Molly, is what this letter says.'

'Other letters say the same thing. Now, Captain, let us write.'

The letter, which was dictated by the Vicar, was duly written, signed, and sealed. Then it was sent upstairs, without the delay of a moment, to his Lordship's private room.

CHAPTER XXXII

A RESPITE

I was as one who carries a respite for a man already in the cart and on his way to Tyburn; or I was as one who himself receives a respite on the way to Tyburn. For, if the charges in those letters were true, there could be no doubt as to the results of an inquiry. Now, could there be any doubt that Lord Fylingdale, in such a case, would refuse an inquiry? I ran, therefore, as if everything depended on my speed, and I arrived breathless.

Molly was alone, walking about the garden restlessly. The sun was now set, but the glow of the sky lingered, and her face was flushed in the western light. 'Jack,' she cried, 'I thought we had parted this afternoon. What has happened? You have been running. What is it?'

'A good deal has happened, Molly. For one thing, you will not be married to-morrow morning.'

'Why not? Is my Lord ill?'

'Not that I know of. But you will not be married to-morrow morning.'

'You talk in riddles, Jack.'

'Would you like to put off the wedding, Molly?'

'Alas! If I could put it off altogether! I am downhearted over it, Jack. It weighs me down like lead. But there is no escape.'

'I think I have in my pocket a means of escape—a

respite, at least—unless there are worse liars in the world than those we have at Lynn.'

'Liars at Lynn, Jack? Who are they? Oh, Jack, what has happened?'

I sat down on a garden-bench. 'Molly,' I said, 'you hold the private character of Lord Fylingdale in the highest esteem, do you not?'

'There is no better man living. This makes me ashamed of being so loath to marry him.'

'Well, but, Molly, consider. Who hath bestowed this fine character upon his Lordship?'

'Everybody who knows him—Sam Semple, for one. He is never weary of singing the praises of his patron.'

'He is a grateful soul, and, on his own account, a pillar of truth. I will show you presently what an ornament he is to truth. Who else?'

'The Reverend Benjamin Purdon, once his tutor. Surely he ought to know.'

'Surely. Nobody ought to know better. I will show you presently how admirable a witness to character this reverend divine must be esteemed.'

'There is Sir Harry Malyns, who assured us that his Lordship is thought to be too virtuous for the world of fashion.'

'He is himself, like the parson, a fine judge of character. Is that all?'

'No. The Lady Anastasia herself spoke to me of his nobility.'

'She has also spoken to me—of other things. See here, Molly.' I lugged out the two letters. 'What I have here contains the characters of all these excellent persons; the latest scandals about them, their reputation, and their practices.'

'But, Jack, what scandals? What reputations?'

'You shall see, Molly. Oh, the allegations may be false, one and all! For what I know, Sam may have the wings of an archangel and Mr. Purdon may be already over-ripe for the New Jerusalem. But you shall read.'

I offered her the letters.

'No,' she said; 'read them yourself.'

'The first, then, is from my father's first cousin, Zackary Pentecrosse, a bookseller in Little Britain, which is a part of London. He is, I believe, a respectable, God-fearing man. You will observe that he does not vouch for the truth of his information.'

I then read, at length, the letter which you have already heard.

'What do you think, Molly?'

'I don't know what to think. Is the world so wicked?'

'Here is another letter, concerning the Reverend Benjamin Purdon. Observe that this is another and an independent witness.' So I read the second letter, which you have also heard. 'What do you think of this worthy gentleman, Molly?'

'Oh, Jack, I am overwhelmed! Tell me more what it means.'

'It means, my dear, that a ruined gamester thought to find an heiress who would know nothing of his tarnished reputation. She must be rich. All he wanted was her money. She must not have her money tied up. It must be all in his own hands, to do with it what he chose; that is to say, to dissipate and waste it in riot and raking and gambling.'

'Lord Fylingdale? Jack! Think of his face! Think of his manners! Are they such as you would expect in a rake?'

'There are, perhaps, different kinds of rakes. Tom Rising would spend the night drinking and bawling songs.

Another kind would practise wickedness as eagerly, but with more politeness. What do I know of such men? Certain I am that Lord Fylingdale would not scour the streets and play the Mohock; but that he has found other vices more pleasant and more (apparently) polite is quite possible.'

'I don't understand, Jack. All the gentlemen, like Mr. Rising, drink and sing. Do all gentlemen who do not drink practise other vices?'

I think that I must have learned the wisdom of what followed from some book.

'Well, Molly, you have seen the Vicar taste a glass of wine. He will roll it in the glass; he will hold it to the light, admiring the colour; he will inhale the fragrance; he will drink it slowly, little by little, sipping the contents, and he will not take more than a single glass or two at the most. In the same time Tom Rising would have gulped down a whole bottle. One man wants to gratify many senses; the other seeks only to get drunk as quickly as he can. So, I take it, with the forbidden pleasures of the world. One man may cultivate his taste; the other may be satisfied with the coarse and plentiful debauchery. This is not, however, talk for honest folk like you and me.'

'Go on with your story, Jack. Never mind the different ways of wickedness.'

'Well, the gamester heard of an heiress. She belonged to a town remote from fashion—a town of simple merchants and sailors; she was very rich; much richer than he at first believed.'

'Who told him about this heiress?'

'A creature called Sam Semple, whom the Captain once cudgelled. Why, Molly, it was revenge. In return for the cudgelling he would place you and your fortune in the

hands of a man who would bring misery upon you and ruin on your fortune. Heavens, how the thing works out! And it happened just in the nick of time that a spring was found in the town—a spring whose medicinal properties—— Ha!' I jumped to my feet. 'Molly, who found that spring? Sam Semple. Who wrote to the Doctor about it? Sam Semple. Who spread abroad a report that the physicians of London were sending their patients to Lynn? Sam Semple. How many patients have come to us from London? None—save and except only the party of those who came secretly in his lordship's train—to sing his praises and work his wicked will. Why, Molly——' I burst into a laugh, for now I understood, as one sometimes does understand, suddenly and without proof other than the rapid conclusion, the full meaning of the whole. 'Molly, I say, there has never been any medicinal spring here at all; the Doctor's well is but common spring water; there are no cures; the whole business is a plan—a bite—an invention of Sam Semple!'

'Jack, have a care. How can that be, when the Doctor has a long list of cures?'

'I know not. But I do know that Sam Semple invented the Spa in order to bring down this invasion of sharpers and gamblers and heiress-hunters. Oh, what a liar he is! What revenge! What cunning! What signal service has this servant of the devil rendered to his master!'

Truly, I was carried out of myself by this discovery, which explained everything.

'So,' I went on, 'they came here all the way from London, with their lying excuse that they were ordered here by their physicians; and we, poor simple folk, fell into the snare, all the countryside fell into the snare, and we have been fooled into drinking common water and calling it what you please; and we have built Gardens, and

engaged musicians, and created a Spa, and—oh, Lord! Lord! what a liar he is! What a liar! This comes, I suppose, of being a poet!'

Then Molly laid her hand upon my arm. 'Jack,' she said, very seriously, 'do you really believe this story? Only consider what it means to me.' Molly was more concerned about Lord Fylingdale than about Sam Semple.

'I believe every word of it, Molly. I believe that they have all joined in the conspiracy—more or less; that they have all got promises; and that to-morrow morning, if you do not refuse to meet this man in St. Nicholas' Church, you will bring upon yourself nothing but misery and ruin.'

'I have promised to meet him. I must at least send him a message, if only to say that I shall not come.'

'I should like to send him nothing. But you are right. It is best to be courteous. Well, you may send him a letter. I will myself take it to the "Crown."'

'But afterwards, Jack. What shall we do afterwards? If he is innocent he will take offence. If not——'

'If you were engaged to marry a young merchant, Molly, or a skipper, and you heard rumours of bankruptcy, drink, or evil courses, what would you do?'

'I would tell him that I had heard such and such about him, and I should ask for explanations.'

'Then do exactly the same with Lord Fylingdale. He is accused of certain things. The Captain must make inquiry—he is bound to inquire. Why, the Vicar himself says that he would, if necessary, in order to ascertain the truth, travel all the way to London, there to learn the foundations, if any, for these charges, and afterwards into Gloucestershire, where his Lordship's country mansion stands, to learn on the spot what the tenants and the people of the country know of him.'

'But suppose he refuses explanations. He is too proud to be called to account.'

'Then send him packing, Lord or no Lord, proud or humble. If he furnishes explanations—if these things are untrue—then—why, then, you will consider what to do. But, Molly, I do not believe that any explanations will be forthcoming, and that your noble lover will carry it off to the end with the same lofty pride and cold mien.'

'Let us go into the parlour, Jack. There are the Captain's writing materials. Help me to say what is proper. Oh! is it possible? Can I believe it? Are these things true? That proud man, raised above his fellows by his virtues and his rank and his principles! Jack, he risked his life for me.'

'Ask no more questions, Molly. We must have explanations. Let us write the letter.'

It was Molly's first letter; the only letter, perhaps, that she will ever write in all her life. Certainly she had never written one before, nor has she ever written one since. Like most housewives, her writing is only wanted for household accounts, receipts for puddings and pies, and the labelling of her bottles and jars. I have the letter before me at this moment. It is written in a large sprawling hand, and the spelling is not such as would satisfy my father.

Naturally she looked to me for advice. I had written many letters to my owners and to foreign merchants about cargoes and the like, and was therefore able to advise the composition of a letter which should be justly expressed and to the point:—

'Honoured Lord,

'This is from me at the present moment in my guardian's parlour.' [She wrote 'in parlour' as I, the mate

of a ship, should have written 'in port' or 'in harbour.'] 'It is to inform you that intelligence has been brought by letters from London and Cambridge. Touching the matters referred to in these letters, I have to report for your satisfaction, that they call your Lordship, in round terms, a gamester and a ruined rake; and your companions at the Spa, viz., Sam Semple, the parson, the rickety old beau, and the Colonel, simple rogues, common cheats, and sharpers. Shall not, therefore, meet your Lordship at the church to-morrow morning as instructed. Awaiting your Lordship's explanations and commands,

'Your most obedient, humble servant,

'Molly.'

This letter I folded, sealed, addressed, and dropped into my pocket. Then I bade Molly good-night, entreated her to be thankful for her escape, and so left her with a light heart; verily it seemed as if the sadness of the last two months had been wholly and suddenly lifted. On my way back to the 'Crown' I passed the Lady Anastasia's lodging just as her chair was brought to the house. I opened the door for her and stood hat in hand.

'Why, it is Jack,' she cried. 'It is the sailor Jack—the constant lover. Have you anything more to tell me?'

'Only that Molly will not keep that appointment of to-morrow morning.'

'Oh! That interesting appointment in St. Nicholas' Church. May a body ask why the ceremony has been postponed?'

'Things have been disclosed at the last moment. Fortunately, in time.'

'What things, and by whom?'

'By letter. It is stated as a fact well known that Lord

Fylingdale is nothing better than a ruined rake and a notorious gamester.'

'Indeed? The excellent Lord Fylingdale? Impossible! Quite impossible! The illustrious example of so many virtues! The explanations will be, I am sure, complete and satisfactory. Ruined? A rake? A notorious gamester? What next will the world say? Does his Lordship know of this discovery? Not yet. You said it was a discovery, did you not? Well, my friend, I am much obliged to you for telling me. You are quite sure Molly will not be there? Very good of you to tell me. For my own part, I start for London quite early—at five o'clock. Good-bye, Jack.'

Then I went to the 'Crown,' where I learned that the Captain had been reading another letter containing accusations as bad as those in the other two.

So we fell to talking over the business, and we congratulated the Captain that he had sent that letter; and we resolved that he should refuse to receive the villain Sam Semple; and that the Vicar should, if necessary, proceed to London, and there learn what he could concerning the past history and the present reputation of the noble suitor. Meantime, I said no more about the intended marriage at St. Nicholas' Church and the abandonment of the plan. As things turned out, it would have been far better had I told the Captain and had we both planted ourselves as sentinels at the door, so as to be quite sure that Molly did not go forth at six in the morning.

That evening, after leaving me, Lady Anastasia sent a note to Lord Fylingdale. 'I am leaving Lynn early tomorrow morning. I expect to be in London in two days. Shall write to Molly.'

CHAPTER XXXIII

A WEDDING

I ROWED myself aboard that evening in a strange condition of exultation, for I had now no doubt—no doubt at all—that the charges were true, and that a conspiracy of the most deadly kind was not only discovered, but also checked. And I could not but admire the craft and subtlety displayed by the favourite of the Muses in devising a plan by which it was made possible for the conspirators to come altogether without the least suspicion to the town of Lynn. How else could they come? For reasons political? But Lynn is a borough in the hands of Sir Robert Walpole, of Houghton. Nobody could stand against him, nor could anyone in Lord Fylingdale's rank visit the town in its ordinary condition without receiving an invitation to Houghton if Sir Robert was there. Unless, indeed, there were reasons why he should not be visited or received. What Sam had not expected was, without doubt, the wonderful success of his deception; the eagerness with which the country round accepted his inventions; the readiness with which they drank those innocent waters; the miraculous cures effected; and the transformation of the venerable old port and trading town into a haunt and resort of fashion for the pursuit of pleasure.

Thinking of all these things, and in blissful anticipation of the discomfiture of all the conspirators, there was an

important thing that I quite forgot, namely, to send Molly's letter to her suitor in his room at the 'Crown.' I carried the letter in my pocket. I undressed and lay down in my bunk. I slept with a light heart, dreaming only of things pleasant, until the morning, when the earliest stroke of the hammer from the yard and the quay woke me up. It was then half-past five. I sat up. I rubbed my eyes. I then suddenly remembered that the letter was in my pocket still.

It was, I say, half-past five. The engagement was for six o'clock. I might have time yet to stop Lord Fylingdale.

It does not take long to dress. You may imagine that I did not spend much time in powdering my hair. In a quarter of an hour I was over the side of the ship and in my dinghy.

By the clock on the Common Stathe it was five minutes to six when I landed and made her fast. I climbed the stairs, and ran as fast as my legs could carry me to the 'Crown.' As I reached the door the clock struck six. Was Lord Fylingdale in his room? I was too late. He had left the house some ten minutes before, and had been carried in his chair across the Market Place.

I followed. It was already five minutes past the hour. I should find him in the church, chafing at the delay. I would give him the letter and retire.

The Market Place was filled with the market people and with the townspeople who came to buy. I pushed across, stepping over a basket, and jostled by women with poultry and vegetables. It was, however, seven or eight minutes past six when I arrived at the church; the doors of the south porch were open. Within I heard the sound of voices—or, at least, of one voice. I looked in.

Heavens! What had happened? Not only was I late with my letter, but—but—could I believe my eyes?

Molly herself stood before the altar; facing her was Lord Fylingdale, who held her hand. Within the rails stood the Reverend Benjamin Purdon; beside him, the clerk, to make the responses. And the minister, when I arrived, was actually saying the words which the bridegroom repeats after the minister, completing in effect the marriage ceremony: 'I, Ludovick, take thee, Mary, to my wedded wife . . .' and so on according to the form prescribed. And again, the words beginning, 'With this ring I thee wed . . .'

I stood and listened, lost in wonder.

Then came the prayer prescribed. After which the clergyman joined their hands together, saying:—

'Those whom God hath joined together, let no man put asunder.'

I heard no more. I sat down on the nearest bench. What was the meaning of this sudden change? Remember that I had left Molly only a few hours before this, fully resolved that she would demand an inquiry into the statements and charges made in the two letters; resolved that she would not keep that engagement; her admiration for the proud, brave, noble creature, her lover, turned into loathing.

And now—now, in the early morning, with her letter in my pocket stating her change of purpose—I found her at the altar, and actually married.

'Whom God hath joined together, let no man put asunder.'

What if the man Purdon was all that he was described? The priestly office confers rights and powers which are independent of the man who holds that office. Whatever his private wickedness, Purdon was a clergyman, and therefore he could marry people.

Molly stood before the altar as had been arranged; she

wore a black silk domino; she had on a pink silk cloak with a hood drawn over her head, so that she was quite covered up and concealed. But I knew her by her stature, which was taller than the common, and by the dress, which had been agreed upon.

Then the bridegroom offered his hand and led the bride into the vestry. They were to sign the marriage register.

And here I rose and slunk away. I say that I slunk away. If you like it better, I crawled away, for I was sick at heart. The thing which I most dreaded, the marriage of our girl to a rake and a gamester, had been actually accomplished. Misery and ruin; misery and ruin; misery and ruin would be her lot. And in my pocket was her letter asking for explanations — and withdrawing her promise for the morrow! Could one believe one's senses?

I crawled away, ashamed for the first time in my life of the girl I loved. Women, I said to myself, are poor, weak creatures. They believe everything; Lord Fylingdale must have been with her early. He had but to deny the whole; she accepted the denial; despite her resolution she walked with him to the church as the lamb goes to the shambles. Oh, Molly! Molly! Who would have believed it of you?

I left the church and went away. I thought of going to the Captain; of telling my father; of telling the Vicar; but it seemed like treachery, and I refrained. Instead, I walked back to the quay, and paddled to the ship, where presently the barges came alongside and the day's work began. Fortunate it is for a man that at moments of great unhappiness his work has to be done and he is compelled to put aside his sorrow and to think upon his duty. But, alas! Poor Molly! Who could have believed it possible?

Well, you see, I did not follow this wedding to an end. Had I gone into the vestry I should have been witness of something very unexpected. Had not the Lady Anastasia —who, I now understand, was tortured by jealousy— promised that 'something should happen?'

The clergyman had the registers lying on the table open. He took a pen and filled in the forms. He then offered the pen to the bride.

'My lady,' he said, 'I must ask your Ladyship to sign the register. In duplicate, if you please.'

The bride sat down, and in a large bold hand wrote her name, 'Mary Miller.'

Then the bridegroom took the pen and signed 'Fylingdale.'

The clergyman shook the pounce box over the names and shut up the books, which he gave to the clerk. This officer took the books and locked them in the great trunk which held the papers and books of the church, putting the key in his pocket.

'And now,' said Mr. Purdon, 'let me congratulate my noble patron and the newly-made Countess on this auspicious event. I have brought with me a bottle of the finest port the "Crown" possesses, and I venture to drink health, happiness, and prosperity.' So saying he produced a bottle and glasses. The bride, without saying a word, inclined her head to the bridegroom and drank off her glass. Lord Fylingdale, who looked, if one may say so of a bridegroom, peevish and ill at ease, raised his glass. 'To your happiness, Molly!' he said.

So all was finished. 'You are going home, Molly?' he asked. 'For the present—that is to say, for a day or two, it will be best. I shall claim you very soon. There is no one but ourselves in the vestry': for the clerk, having

locked the box and accepted the guinea bestowed upon him by the bridegroom, was now tramping down the church and through the porch. No one but themselves was in the vestry or the church. 'You may, therefore, take off your domino.'

'As your Lordship pleases.' Lord Fylingdale started. Whose voice was that?

'As you order, I obey.' So the bride removed her domino and threw back the hood.

The bridegroom started. 'What is this?' he cried, furious, with certain words which were out of place in a church.

'Lady Anastasia!' cried Mr. Purdon. 'Good Lord! Then we are all undone!'

'What does it mean? Tell me, she-devil—what does it mean? Where is Molly? But this is play-acting. This is not a marriage.'

'I fear, my Lord,' said the parson, 'that it is a marriage. The registers are in the strong-box. They cannot be altered.'

'Go after the clerk, man. Order him to give up the keys. Tear the pages out of the registers.'

'I cannot,' said Mr. Purdon. 'I dare not. The man is a witness of this marriage; he has seen the entry in the register. I dare not alter them or destroy a single page. I have done a great deal for your Lordship, but this thing I cannot do. It is a marriage, I say. You are married to the Lady Anastasia here.'

'Talk! talk! Go after the man. Bring back the man. Tear the keys from him. Silence the man! Buy his silence! By ——! I will murder him, if I must, in order to stop his tongue.'

'Your Lordship forgets your bride—your happy, smiling, innocent bride!'

'WHAT IS THIS?' HE CRIED.

He cursed her. He raised his hand as if to strike her down, but forbore.

'I told you,' she continued, 'that in everything I was at your service—except in one thing. Tear the registers; murder the clerk; but the bride will be left. And if you murder her as well you will be no nearer the possession of the lovely Molly.'

The bridegroom sank into a chair. He was terrible to look at, for his wrath and disappointment deprived him of the power of speech. Where was now the cold and haughty front? It was gone. He sat in the chair, upright, his face purple, his eyes starting from his head as one who hath some kind of fit.

The clergyman, still in his white surplice, looked on and trembled, for his old pupil was in a murderous frame of mind. There was no knowing whom he might murder. Besides, he had before this divined the true meaning of the visit to Lynn; and he foresaw ruin to himself as well as his patron.

Lord Fylingdale turned upon him suddenly and cursed him for a fool, an ass, a villain, a traitor. 'You are in the plot,' he said. 'You knew all along. You have been suborned.'

'My Lord—my Lord, have patience. What could I know? I was bidden to be here at six to marry you. I supposed that the bride was the fair Miss Molly. I could not tell; I knew nothing. The lady was in a domino. It is irregular to be married in a domino. But your Lordship wished it. What could I do?'

'Send for the key, then, and destroy the registers.'

'Alas! my Lord, it is now, you may be sure, all over the town that you have been married, and to Miss Molly.'

'Where is Molly? Where is Molly, then? Why did she keep away?'

The bride looked on with her mocking smile of triumph. 'You may murder me,' she said, 'but you will not undo the marriage. I have been married, it is true, under a false name; but I am married none the less.'

'You have brought ruin upon us all,' her husband said. 'Ruin—headlong ruin. I am at my last guinea. I can raise no more money—I have no more credit. You, yourself, are as much discredited.'

'If you are ruined,' the lady replied, 'you are rightly punished. How many vows have you made to me? How many lies have you invented to keep me quiet?'

'With submission, my Lord,' Mr. Purdon stammered, for terror and bewilderment held him, 'this is a bad morning's work. Let me advise that before the town is awake we leave the church and talk over the business in her Ladyship's rooms, or elsewhere. We must be in private. To curse and to swear helps nothing; nor does it help to talk of a jealous revenge. Let us go.'

It was with a tottering step, as if he was smitten with palsy, that the bridegroom walked down the aisle. The bride put up her domino, and threw her hood over her head, and so with the parson, in silence, walked away from the church to her lodging, leaving the bridegroom to come by himself.

As yet the market people had not heard the news.

But the news spread. The clerk told his wife. 'I come from the church,' he said. 'I have witnessed the marriage of Miss Molly—Captain Crowle's Molly—with the noble Lord who wears the star and looks so grand—a private wedding it was. I know not why. The parson was the Reverend Mr. Purdon, he who reads the Morning Prayers and preaches on Sunday.'

Then the clerk's wife, slipping on her apron—for such folk find the shelter of the apron for their hands necessary

in conversation—ran round to the Pump Room. No one was there as yet, but the two dippers. To them she communicated the news.

Then she went on to the market and told all the people of the town chaffering there.

At seven o'clock the Captain, walking in his garden, was surprised by the arrival of the Horns, who stood before the house and performed a noble flourish. 'What the devil is that for?' said the Captain. Then there arrived the butchers, with their marrow-bones and cleavers, and began to make their music with zeal. The Captain went out to them. Up went their hats.

'Huzza for Miss Molly and her husband!'

'Her husband? What do you mean?'

'Her husband—his Lordship—married this morning!'

'What?' The Captain stared in amazement. Then he rushed into the house. Molly was in the kitchen. 'What is this?' he asked. 'The butchers are here and the Horns, and they swear you were married this morning, Molly!'

'Why, Captain, I have not been outside the door. I am not married, I assure you, and I begin to think, now, that I never shall be married.'

The Captain went out and dismissed the musicians. But the thing troubled him, and he was already sick at heart on account of the last night's discourse and its discoveries.

CHAPTER XXXIV

A NEW COMPACT

What followed, by invention and design of the pious ecclesiastic, Mr. Purdon, was a villainy even greater than that at first designed—more daring, more cruel.

The bride, accompanied by the minister officiating in the late ceremony, walked back to her lodging. She was still exultant in the first glow and triumph of her revenge. He, on the other hand, walked downcast, stealthily glancing at his companion, his big head moving sideways like the head of a bear, his sallow cheeks paler than was customary. The bridegroom, for his part, flung himself into his chair, and so was carried to the lady's lodging. A strange wedding procession!

She threw off her cloak and her domino, and stood before her newly-made lord, her eyes bright, her face flushed, her lips quivering. She was filled with revenge only half satiated; but revenge can never be wholly satisfied; and she was filled with the triumph of victory.

'I have won!' she said; 'you tried to deceive me again, Ludovick. But I have won. You have been caught in your own toils.'

He took the nearest chair, sitting down in silence, but his face was dark. As she looked upon him, some of the triumph died out of her eyes; her cheek lost its glow; she began to be frightened. What would he say—or do—

next? As for his Reverence, he stood close to the door as if ready for instant flight. Indeed, there was cause for uncertainty because the man was desperate and his sword was at his side.

'Silence!' he said, 'or I may kill you.'

Then there was silence. The other two did not speak. The lady threw herself on the sofa, twisting her fingers nervously.

'You have married me, you say. You shall be a happy wife. You cannot imagine how happy you will be.'

In a contest of tongues the woman has the best of it.

'So long as you, my Lord, enjoy the same happiness, or even greater, I shall not repine. You intended my happiness in another way.'

'You have destroyed my last chance. It is a good beginning.'

'A better ending, my Lord. The fond mistress whom you have fooled so long becomes the wife. It is not the duty of a wife to provide for her husband. Nor will the Countess of Fylingdale allow the Earl to enter her house. She will want the proceeds of her bank for herself. In a word, my Lord, you are not only my husband, but you are now privileged to provide for yourself.'

He sprang to his feet and fell to common and violent cursing, invoking the immediate and miraculous intervention of that Power which he had all his life insulted and defied. The lady received the torrent without a word; what can one say in reply to a man who only curses? But she was afraid of him; his words were like blows; the headlong rage of the man cowed her; she bent her head and covered her face with her hands.

Then Mr. Purdon ventured to interfere. 'Let me speak,' he said. 'The thing is done. It cannot be undone. Would it not be better to make the best of it?

Does it help any of us—does it help your Lordship—to revile and to threaten?'

The bridegroom turned upon him savagely.

'You to speak!' he said. 'You, who are too mealy-mouthed and too virtuous even to tear up a page from a register.'

'I do not wish to be unfrocked, or to be sent to the Plantations, my Lord. Meantime, it would be doing you the worst service in the world if I were to tear out that page.'

'Oh! you talk—you always talk.'

'Of old, my Lord, I have sometimes talked to some purpose.'

'Talk again, then. What do you mean by disservice? You will say next, I suppose, that this play-acting was fortunate for me.'

'We may sometimes turn disasters into victories. If your Lordship will listen——'

His patron sat down again—the late storm leaving its trace in a scowling face and twitching lips.

'Why the devil was not Molly there? How did this woman find out? How did she know that Molly was not coming?'

'I can answer these questions,' said the lady. 'Molly would not come because she learned last night, just in time, certain facts in the private life of the bridegroom——'

'What?' Lord Fylingdale betrayed his terror. 'She has heard? What has she heard?' He had not, as you have read, received Molly's letter, nor had he opened the Captain's letter. Therefore, he knew nothing.

'She has heard more than enough. You have lost your bride and her fortune. I might have warned you, but I preferred to take her place.'

'What has she heard?'

'Apparently, all that there is to be heard. Not, of course, all that could be told if Mr. Purdon were to speak. Merely things of public notoriety. That you are a gambler and a rake; that you have ruined many; that you are ruined yourself. Oh! Quite enough for a girl of her class to learn. In our rank we want much more before we turn our back upon a man. I, myself, know much more. Yet I have married you.'

'She has heard——' Lord Fylingdale repeated.

'Dear, dear!' said the parson. 'All this is most unfortunate—most unfortunate. Your Lordship has already lost your bride—lost her,' he repeated; 'lost her—and her fortune. Is there no way out?'

'Who brought these reports? Show me the man!'

'Ta-ta-ta! You need not bluster, Ludovick. Reports of this kind are in the air; they cling to your name; they travel with you. What? The notorious Lord Fylingdale! They have come, you see, at last, even to this unfashionable corner of the island. They are here, although we have done so much to declare your virtues. Acknowledge that you have been fortunate so far.'

'Are these reports your doing, madam? Is this a part of your infernal jealousy?'

'I do not know who put them about. It is not likely I should start such reports—especially after the scandal at Bath. I am, in fact, like his Reverence here, too much involved myself. Oh! we have beautiful characters—all three of us.'

'Who told Molly?'

'I say that I know nothing. She has been warned. That is all I can tell you, and she has been advised to take no further steps until full explanations have been made in answer to these rumours.'

'Full explanations,' repeated Mr. Purdon. 'Dear, dear! Most unfortunate! most unfortunate!'

'Your Lordship can refer to his Reverence here, or to the admirable Semple; or to the immaculate Sir Harry; or to the Colonel—that man of nice and well-known honour—for your character. But who will give them a character? Understand,' she said, facing him, 'you had lost your bride before you got out of bed this morning. Your only chance now is to imitate the example of Tom Rising and to carry her off. And she will then stick a knife between your ribs, as she intended to do to that worthy gentleman. But no. I forgot. You cannot do that, for you are already married.'

His Reverence again interposed. 'With submission, my Lord, some explanations will be asked. It will not, certainly, be convenient to offer any. There is, however, one way—and only one—that I can suggest.' He looked at the Lady Anastasia. 'It will be, perhaps, at first, distasteful to her Ladyship. It has, however, the very great advantage of securing the fortune, which, I take it, is what your Lordship chiefly desires. As regards the girl, she is in point of manners and appearance so far beneath your Lordship's notice that we need not consider her in the matter.'

'I care nothing about the girl, but hang me if I understand one single syllable of what you mean, or how you can secure the fortune without the girl.'

'It is not always necessary to carry your wife about with you. She might be left with her friends. A marriage without settlement places, I believe, a woman's fortune absolutely in the hands of her husband.'

Neither of his listeners made the least sign of understanding what he meant.

'Strange!' he said. 'I should have thought that this

way would have been seized upon immediately. It is wonderful that you do not understand.'

'Pray, Mr. Purdon,' said the lady, 'do not credit me, at least, with the power of following your mind in all its crookedness.'

'Let us consider the situation. I was somewhat surprised when your Lordship instructed me to come to this place. Surprised and suspicious. Naturally, I kept my eyes open. I very soon discovered what was proposed. Here was a girl whom Semple had represented to your Lordship as a great heiress. You want an heiress at this juncture. I followed the course of events with satisfaction. You were civil to the girl when all the company trampled upon her; you were affable to the old fool, her guardian; you made private and personal inquiry into her fortune; you succeeded in representing yourself as a man of virtue and high principle—all this was cleverly managed. But you made one mistake. You concealed your true intentions from the Lady Anastasia.'

'It was her infernal jealousy. Why couldn't she let me marry the girl and leave her in Gloucestershire—out of the way?'

'A great mistake. I thought that my pupil knew the sex better. Jealousy, my Lord, supposes love; and love can always be directed into the other channel of submission. Well, the marriage was arranged; you had already taken the precaution of getting a license. Then, at the last moment, these sinister reports began. How far they can be explained away—how many others they involve; how many scandals they revive—we know not. But explanation—explanation—no, no—that would be the devil!'

'Go on, man. You talk for ever.'

'Had these reports been delayed but a single day—had they arrived after the marriage!'

'But they arrived before the marriage.'

'Quite so; which brings me to my proposal. Here you are—at your last guinea. So am I. You can raise no more money. If I were not your domestic chaplain I should be in the King's Bench. I have lived on your bounty for ten years and more. I hoped to go on with the same support. To be sure, I have earned my money. I have been of service on many occasions, but I am grateful, and I would, if I could, for the sake of old times, assist your Lordship on this occasion.'

'I want all the assistance I can get. That is quite certain.'

'And I want all the money I can get. I always intended, somehow or other, to get a slice of this pudding. If I put it into your Lordship's power to claim and to seize upon this fortune, which seems to have been snatched out of your hands at the last moment, I must have my share.'

'Your share? What do you call your share?'

'Twelve thousand pounds.'

'Twelve thousand devils!'

'You can get nothing without me. If you refuse I can, at least, tell everybody the pleasant truth about this morning's work, and how the biter was bit.'

'Go on with your proposal, then.'

'You will give me a promise—a bill, if you like, payable in two months—you will not be able to get through all that money in two months—for twelve thousand pounds.'

'It is a monstrous sum. But, on condition that you place this girl's fortune in my hands—however, it is impossible. Well, you shall have my promise—on my honour as a peer.' He placed his right hand upon his heart.

The clergyman grinned. 'Your Lordship gives me more than I dare to ask. It is a bill—a written document—not a promise, even on your honour as a peer. Give me

that and I will show you the way. Stay—nothing can be done without me—I will tell you my scheme before you sign that paper. Now, listen—you had already lost your bride when you arrived at the church. Her Ladyship most fortunately——'

'How, sir, most fortunately?'

'A moment. Madam saw her way to the revenge of jealousy. She took the place of the bride. And she was married as Miss Molly; she signed the name of Molly Miller; the license was in that name. The clerk who was present has, I am sure, already carried the news all over the place. We have the evidence, therefore, of the bridegroom, the parson, the clerk, the license, the registers. Who is to prove that the real Molly was at home all the time? Captain Crowle, perhaps, though I doubt it. The girl herself—but who will believe her? My Lord, you have married Miss Molly, and not the Lady Anastasia.'

'What then?'

'You have only to claim your bride.'

'Sir! You forget that I am the bride,' Lady Anastasia interposed quickly.

Mr. Purdon bowed and smiled, rubbing his hands softly. 'With submission, madam. I do not advise that his Lordship should carry her off, nor that he should claim her *ad mensam et thorum*, as we scholars say. His principles would not, I am sure, allow that he should carry off an unmarried woman. Not at all. He will leave her with her friends. Indeed, he would prefer to do so. I suggest only that we should proclaim the marriage and lay hands upon the fortune.'

'She is to be the Countess. And what am I to be?'

'His Lordship's best friend. You will rescue him in his deepest need; you will restore him to affluence; it will be a service, madam, of the purest and most disinterested

affection, instead of an ugly and ruinous revenge. Heavens! Can you hesitate?'

Thus did he gloss over the villainy, so that the poor woman almost believed that she was entering upon a course of virtuous benevolence, and, as the man said, a service of love.

'But the girl—Molly. She will not consent to be a Countess in name.'

'She and her friends will protest; but they will be overborne; meantime, she has the virtue and pride of her station. Will she even consent, do you think, to call herself a Countess when she is not married? Why, we actually make a ladder for ourselves to climb thereby, out of her virtue.'

He looked at the lady no longer stealthily, but full in the face, with a smile, as if he was proposing a scheme of the noblest kind; as if there was nothing to be hidden, and no perjuries to be advanced.

Lord Fylingdale, too, turned to her with a face of inquiry and doubt.

'What is your Lordship's opinion?'

'It is a scheme of great audacity. It will require bold handling.'

'It shall be boldly handled, if I may advise.'

'It is certain to be resisted with the utmost indignation.'

'Of that there is no doubt. But the end is also certain. Nothing can withstand the evidence of our case. It is so clear that I myself am of opinion that the bride was actually Miss Molly.'

They both looked at Lady Anastasia, who made no response—her eyes were in her lap.

'The truth will lie with us three,' the tempter went on. 'Only with us three. Neither of us will reveal it.'

'As regards jealousy, Anastasia, the girl will be here, and everything will continue just as before.'

She threw up her arms and sprang to her feet. 'Oh!' she cried, 'it is the most monstrous villainy.'

'We need not think of the girl. We must think of ourselves.'

'A service of love,' murmured Mr. Purdon, 'a beautiful, a noble service of love!'

'The fortune is immense, Anastasia. It is ridiculous that the girl should have so much. We will leave her a competence. Besides, there are the jewels.'

Lady Anastasia gasped.

'You yourself will adorn these jewels. It will be my greatest pleasure to atone for my ill-judged deception by giving you all those jewels—the diamonds, the rubies, the chains of pearls, and all the rest of the pretty glittering things.' He took her hands, the parson looking on all the time as a physician looks on at a blood-letting or an operation. 'What can that girl do with jewels? They shall all be yours. Forgive me, Anastasia, and let us again work together as we have already done—you and I—with no more jealousy and no more suspicions.'

He kissed her hand. His manner was changed almost suddenly; he became soft, caressing, and persuasive. It was the old charm which the poor lady could never resist. She suffered him to hold her hand; she allowed him to kiss her hand; her eyes grew humid.

'Oh!' she murmured, 'I must do everything you ask, Ludovick, if you are only kind.'

'How can I be anything but kind?' he replied, with a smile. 'You must forget and forgive. The thought that all I had schemed and planned for was torn from me—and by you, Anastasia—by you—was too much. My mind was upset; I know not what I said. Forgive me!'

'Oh, Ludovick! I forgive.'

'And the jewels shall atone—the lovely jewels. You shall have them all.'

'You will truly give me the jewels?'

'Truly, my Anastasia. After all, we are man and wife. Henceforth we shall only live for each other. Your happiness shall be mine. The jewels shall be yours.'

She yielded; she fell into his arms. There was a complete, a touching reconciliation!

'I agree, then, Purdon,' said his Lordship. 'We both agree. It remains only to choose the best time, the best place, the best manner.'

'Let it be the boldest manner; the most public place; before the largest company. Let there be no mistake possible. Leave this to me, my Lord. Twelve thousand pounds. Your Ladyship will oblige me with pen, ink, and paper? I may point out' (he turned to his former pupil with an ugly grin) 'that if this promise, or bond, or bill is not met I shall proclaim the whole business from the housetop.'

In other words, Lord Fylingdale was going to declare that it was Molly, and none other, who was married that morning at six o'clock, and to assume the rights and powers of a husband. So that the news of his evil reputation came, after all, too late to be of any use. And as for explanations, who would have the right to ask any explanations of a married man on behalf of his wife?

CHAPTER XXXV

'WHAT DOES IT MEAN?'

Fortune was with the conspirators. Everything helped them. First of all, the dippers whispered the news as a profound secret. Then it was whispered about the Pump Room as a profound secret. Then it was carried to the confectioner's; to the bookshop; to the coffee-houses; to the taverns; to the Gardens; and talked about as an event and not a secret at all. It was, indeed, extraordinary that a nobleman of Lord Fylingdale's rank and fortune should stoop to marry the daughter of a plain merchant of Lynn; a homely creature, as the ladies declared; one who had no manners, and was actually ignorant of the polite world. It was said that she was rich. Could the Earl of Fylingdale stoop to pick up her paltry fortune? What was the attraction, then? A bouncing figure; big hands and strong arms; fine eyes, perhaps, and there an end: for the rest, a mere common girl, no better than dozens like herself. Some there were who whispered a word of ugly import in the country. 'It must be witchcraft! Surely,' they said, 'this unfortunate young man has been bewitched. Someone, perhaps the negress, has exercised spells over him to his destruction. The pity of it! The pity of it! It will be three generations, at least, before the stain of this alliance can be wiped out of the family pedigree.'

The Vicar heard the rumour. He hastened at once to find out the truth from the person most certain, as he thought, to know the facts, namely, Molly herself.

'I am to congratulate you, Molly,' he said, 'or must I call you the Countess of Fylingdale?'

'I am certainly not a Countess,' she replied. 'Why, the Horns came here at seven this morning and the butchers with them, all to congratulate me. What does it mean?'

'Then it is not true, Molly? Heavens! how glad I am!'

'Why, certainly not. I wrote to Lord Fylingdale last night. I told him I should not be at the church this morning, as I had promised.'

'Then—is it not true? May I contradict the report?'

'If you please, sir. Did you see Jack last night after he left me?'

'We did. And we learned your resolution. Therefore I was the more astonished.'

'Oh, sir! Pray do not think that I would marry a rake for a title which I do not want and should not adorn.'

'Heavens! My dear Molly, what a load you lift from my heart!'

So he went away. Outside, in the streets, he met the clerk of St. Nicholas. 'What is all this,' he said, 'about a marriage early this morning?'

'Why, sir, it is no secret, I believe. Miss Molly was married at six o'clock to Lord Fylingdale. I was present, and gave away the bride.'

'Are we dreaming? Are we in our right senses? You say, man, that Miss Molly was married this morning—this very morning—to Lord Fylingdale. By whom?'

'By his Reverence Mr. Purdon.'

'By Mr. Purdon? Was the marriage duly celebrated?'

'I AM CERTAINLY NOT A COUNTESS.'

'Surely, sir. They were married by license; and the marriage is entered in the registers.'

'Come to the church and show me the registers.'

The clerk led the way to the vestry and opened the great trunk. There lay the books of the registers. He took them out and showed the entries. Yes; there was no doubt possible. There were the two signatures, 'Fylingdale' and 'Mary Miller,' with the clerk as witness and the signature of 'Benjamin Purdon, Clerk in Orders,' as the officiating minister.

'Now,' said the Vicar, sitting down, 'what does this mean?'

As for myself, I also heard the news. It was brought on board by Captain Jaggard. 'I could have wished,' he said, 'that Captain Crowle had seen his way to marry the girl to some honest man of the place—to you, Jack, or some other. I suppose she is too rich for a merchant or a simple sailor. Pity! Pity! This noble Lord will take her away, and we shall see her no more.'

I did not think it necessary to tell him that I was myself an eye-witness of the wedding, but, as soon as I could get away, I went ashore to learn what was said and reported.

At my father's house behind the school I found the Vicar in a strangely bewildered mind. 'Molly,' he said, 'flatly denies the marriage.'

'Molly denies?' I was amazed.

'And the clerk swears that he gave her away; the registers are duly entered. What does this mean? What does this mean?'

I stared, and for a time made no reply. Molly to utter a falsehood? The thing was incredible. Yet what was I to think?

'Sir,' I said, 'I remembered, early this morning, that I

had forgotten Molly's letter to Lord Fylingdale. I hastened ashore, hoping to be in time to stop his going to the church. I was too late. I hurried on to the church. To my amazement the wedding-service was at the moment being read by Mr. Purdon, and I saw, with my own eyes, Molly, wrapped in her pink cloak, the hood over her head, married to Lord Fylingdale. You cannot think that I was deceived.'

'Why, the thing grows more and more mysterious. Given the fact that Lord Fylingdale is a reprobate, with no principle and no religion, yet he would not pass off another woman as Molly. She would have to be a woman of the vilest character. I do not think there is a woman in Lynn who could be persuaded to such an act of villainy. No, it is impossible; the clerk could not be deceived; the clergyman—to be sure, he is a fit companion for the bridegroom—would not—could not—stoop so low. Think, Jack. Molly stoutly declares that she has not left the house for any purpose whatever. That is a plain assertion. Then we have the evidence of yourself, of the clerk, of the registers, and of the two whose evidence might not be considered trustworthy — the bridegroom and the minister. I do not understand. You say that Molly was dressed in a cloak that you recognised?'

'In her pink silk cloak, such as she throws over her shoulders at the Assembly.'

'There is no escape, I fear—no escape that I can see. What does it mean? Why does Molly make this assertion? She must know that it cannot undo the wedding.'

'I cannot so much as guess. Molly is the most candid and the most truthful of women. She cannot lie. It is impossible. There must be some dreadful mistake.'

'She is, as you say, of a most truthful nature. Yet—how to explain? What does it mean?'

'I saw her hand placed in the bridegroom's, and I heard the words. Then, for my heart sank, I came away.'

'Tell me again. When you left her last night, she was fully resolved not to keep her promise.'

'She was fully resolved, I say. I have her letter—the letter which she wrote with my help, the letter which I ought to have sent to his Lordship.'

I lugged it out of my pocket; the Vicar read it.

'Humph,' he said, 'it is written as if by a supercargo—but that matters nothing. The meaning of it is plain. Her resolution is fixed. She was agitated, Jack.'

'Naturally she was agitated at finding the man, whom she was to marry out of respect and not for love, was unworthy of the least respect.'

'She was agitated.' That was, as you say, natural. She had in her mind, at the same time, the promise to meet her accepted lover at the church at six in the morning. We must remember that. Now, it is difficult to understand a more serious blow to the mind of a young girl than to be told suddenly, without the least preparation for it, that the man she is to marry is not what she believed him to be; not, that is, a man of honour, not a man of virtue, not a man whose conduct is governed by principle. I say that this knowledge may fall upon a woman in such a manner as to distract her for a time.'

'But Molly was not in the least distracted.'

'Not in your judgment. Could you have followed her to the lonely chamber, Jack, you might have witnessed a scene of strange distraction in which contempt took the place of respect; loathing of love; and enmity in place of gratitude. In a word, you would have seen a transformation of the girl. Had you watched her through the night you would have seen the sleeplessness and the restlessness caused by these emotions; you would have seen, perhaps,

with the early morning Nature asserting herself and the girl dropping asleep. After an hour or two she awakes, her mind not yet recovered; she remembers her promise, but not her refusal to keep it; she dresses mechanically; she steps out of the house unseen; she meets the man—he had not received her letter—she goes through the ceremony with him. She returns home, mounts to her room, still without being observed, and again falls asleep. When she awakes there is no memory in her mind of the wedding-service, nor any recollection of what had taken place. There would be left nothing but the memory of last night's revelations.'

He went on to fortify his theory with an abundance of examples taken from antiquity, and from books in which persons have been known to do strange things while seemingly broad awake and in their senses, who, afterwards, remembered nothing. 'I can even understand,' he said, 'a man committing a crime in this unconscious manner, who, in his sane moments, would be incapable of any wickedness. Is this what was formerly called demoniac possession? If so, it is a truly dreadful thing, and one against which we ought to pray.'

The explanation seemed, at least, one that accounted for Molly's strange denial of a simple fact.

'We will leave it so,' he said. 'I will go and talk to Captain Crowle about it, though I doubt whether the Captain can be made to understand these nice distinctions between things as they are and things as they seem. It is, from every point of view, most unfortunate. The poor girl is now the wife of a villain. What will happen to her nobody knows as yet. Nor do I see how we can protect her.'

Accordingly, he laid the matter before the Captain, but failed in persuading him.

'No, sir,' he said; 'there is villainy abroad. I know not of what kind. There is villainy, and there are villains. Molly is not married. She was not out of the house this morning at all. She was with her mother in the still-room. Besides, do you believe it possible for a woman not to know whether she is married or not?'

'Captain, I cannot understand it, except by my theory that——'

'He shan't have her, whatever he says. What? Should I suffer my girl—my ward—to go to him, and that unmarried? Say no more, Vicar—say no more!'

Thinking over the Vicar's distinctions about things as they are and things as they seem, a sudden objection occurred to me.

'If Molly was actually married, whether she remembered it afterwards or not, what became of the wedding-ring?' To this objection I could find no reply. And so the Vicar's explanation, in my mind, fell to the ground, and I was as much at sea as ever. For Molly, who was always as true and candid as a mirror, was now . . . but I could not put the thing into words.

CHAPTER XXXVI

A DAY OF FATE

This was the day when all the villainy came to a head and did its worst and met with the first instalment of exposure. I have told you what was done at the church and what was our own bewilderment, not knowing what to believe or how to explain things. For my own part, though I might have guessed, because I had discovered the jealousy of Lady Anastasia, yet the truth, even the possibility of the truth, never came into my head. I had no manner of doubt, in my own mind, that it was Molly herself, and none other, whom I saw standing as a bride at the altar rails with Lord Fylingdale for a bridegroom. The fact, I say, admitted of no dispute. Yet, why should Molly change her mind? And why should she deny the fact?

I sought her at the house. I begged her to come into the garden and to talk with me privately. Then I asked those two questions. Her answer to both of them was most amazing.

'Jack,' she said, 'I know not what you mean. I have not changed my mind. It is impossible for me to marry a man of whom such things can be said unless he can prove that they are false. How can you think that I have changed my mind? As regards this talk about an early wedding, what do I know about it? At six o'clock

I was in the kitchen with my mother and Nigra. I have not been out of the house at all.'

Then I persisted. I asked her if she could have gone out and had perhaps forgotten.

'Forgotten!' she repeated scornfully. 'Do you suppose that a woman could by any possibility forget her own wedding? But what is it, Jack? What is in your mind?'

Then I told her. 'Molly,' I said, 'last night I forgot your letter. There was so much to think and talk about with these disclosures that I forgot. This morning I remembered. Then I hurried ashore. I ran to the "Crown"; it was just upon six. I was too late. His Lordship had gone out in a chair. I ran to the church. It was just after six. The doors were open; I heard voices. I went in, Molly—do not say that I am dreaming—I saw you—you, I say—you, yourself—with your pink silk cloak, the hood pulled over your head, a domino to hide your face—just as had been arranged.'

'You saw me, Jack? You saw me? How could you see me?'

'And your hand was in Lord Fylingdale's, and Mr. Purdon was pronouncing the words which made you his wife: "Whom God hath joined together, let no man put asunder."'

She stared at me with blank amazement.

'In my pink silk cloak? Jack, are you in your right mind, or is it I myself who am gone distraught?'

'Indeed, I know not which.'

'Did you speak to me? Did you congratulate the bride, Jack?'

'No; I was sick and sorry, Molly. I went out of the church. The clerk, however, has been telling the story of this private marriage all over the town. Everybody

knows it. The marriage is duly entered in the registers. It was a marriage by the Archbishop's license. The man Purdon may be all that the Vicar's letter exposed, but the marriage was in order.'

Molly said nothing for a while. Then she said gently: 'The letter from the bookseller, your cousin, spoke of Lord Fylingdale as ruined. If he were to marry a woman with money it would become his own.'

'I believe that there are sometimes letters—bills of lading, or whatever they are called—which give the wife the control of her own property; otherwise, everything becomes her husband's.'

'Why did he wish to marry me? There was never a gleam of love in his eye—nor a note of love in his voice. Why—except that he might get my money?'

'That is, I am convinced, the reason.'

'Villainy—villainy—villainy! Jack, this is a conspiracy. Some woman has been made to play my part. Then he will claim me as his wife, and lay hands upon all that I have.'

'No, Molly, he shall not, while you have friends.'

'Friends cannot help where the law orders otherwise. So much I know, Jack. Yet you can do one thing for me, you can protect me from the man. He must not take me away.'

'All Lynn will fight for you.'

'Jack, I want more; I want all Lynn to believe me. You have known me all my life. Am I capable of such a change of mind? Am I capable of so monstrous a falsehood as to steal out to marry this man and then to declare that I have never left the house? Oh, the villain! the villain!' Her cheek was aflame; her eyes flashed.

I seized her hand. 'Molly,' I cried, 'they shall all believe you. I will tell the truth everywhere.'

Just then the garden door was thrown open and Sam Semple appeared. With a smiling face and a bending knee he advanced, bowing low.

'Permit me to offer congratulations to the Countess of Fylingdale.'

'I am not a Countess. I am plain Molly Miller.'

Sam looked disconcerted and puzzled. I perceived that, plot or no plot, he had no hand in it.

'I am come,' he said, 'from his Lordship——'

'I have nothing to do with his Lordship.'

'Surely, madam—surely, my Lady—there is some misunderstanding. I am sent by his Lordship with his compliments to ask when it will be convenient for the Countess to receive him.'

'You have been informed, I suppose, that I was married to him this morning?'

'Certainly, my lady.'

'Then go back to Lord Fylingdale and tell him that he is a villain and a liar; that I have learned his true character; that I am not married to him; and that if he ventures to molest me my friends will protect me. Give him that message, sir, word for word.'

'I believe, Sam,' I said, for his discomfiture and bewilderment made him reel and stagger, 'that you have no hand in this new villainy. It was you, however who brought that man to Lynn, knowing his true character and his antecedents. Let us never see your face here again. Go; if I thought you were in this new plot, I would serve you again as the Captain served you three years ago.'

He went away without another word.

Then the Captain came home, his face troubled.

'I know not,' he said, 'what has happened in this place. I have seen Lord Fylingdale. I told him of the charges and accusations.'

'Well? Did he deny them?'

'He denied nothing, and he admitted nothing. He says that you married him this morning, Molly.'

'I know. He has sent Sam Semple here with the same story. Captain, you believe me, do you not?'

'Believe you, Molly? Why, if I did not believe you, I should believe nothing. Believe you? My dear, I would as soon doubt the Prayer Book.' He laid his hand upon her arm and the tears came into his eyes. 'My dear, I have been an old fool. But I did it for the best. He says that you are his wife. Let him come and take you—if he can!'

'It is not Molly that he would take, it is Molly's fortune.'

'Why, sir,' she said, 'if he takes the whole and wastes and dissipates it, so long as he does not take me, what does it matter?'

Then the Vicar came again, and the whole of the business had to be discussed again. At first, he adhered to his theory of unconscious action, because a scholar always likes to explain every theory by examples chosen from Latin and Greek authors. He had looked up several more stories of the kind from I know not what folio volumes in his library, and came prepared to defend his opinion. But the absolute certainty of Molly's assertion; the evidence of her mother, who declared that Molly had been working with her since half-past five; the firm belief of the Captain; and my own change of opinion and the possibility of deception shook him. Finally, he abandoned his learned view, and adopted our more modern explanation of the case, viz., that the marriage was a sham, and that the woman was some creature suborned to personate Molly.

'But what woman can she be?' asked the Vicar. 'She can write. I have seen the registers; she has signed in

a full, round hand, without bad spelling. The woman, therefore, is educated. My dear, we may perhaps find the woman. My worthy and pious brother in Orders is most certainly in the conspiracy. Where there are three one is generally a traitor. To begin with, the scheme is both bold and dangerous. It is the first step towards obtaining a large sum of money under false pretences. Their necks are in danger, even the neck of a noble Earl.'

'It is inconceivable,' he went on, after a little reflection, 'how a woman could be found to play such a part. She must be the mistress of the Earl; no other could be trusted.'

'What should be done meantime?'

'We must meet the enemy on his own ground. He spreads abroad the report that he married Molly this morning. We must publicly and openly deny the fact. Captain, there will be a large company at the Assembly this evening. You will take Molly there. I will go with you. Jack shall put on his Sunday best, and shall also go with us. We must be prepared for an impudent claim, and we must be ready with a prompt denial. Let us court publicity.'

This was clearly the best advice possible. We were left unmolested all the afternoon, though the Captain made me stay as a kind of garrison in case of any attempt at abduction being made.

In the evening, Molly, in her chair and dressed in her finery, was carried to the Gardens, while the Captain, the Vicar, and myself formed a bodyguard.

We arrived after the dancing had begun. Lady Anastasia was looking on, but her court of ladies and young men, for some reason, seemed to have melted away. She stood almost alone, save for the support of the old

beau, Sir Harry. The Colonel was also with her. And the Reverend Benjamin Purdon stood behind her.

The music was in the gallery at the end of the Long Room; the dancing was carried on in the middle. Lady Anastasia was standing on the right of the gallery; most of the company on the left. Molly, with the Captain, and followed by the Vicar and myself, turned to the left.

On her entrance all eyes were fixed upon the newly-made Countess. She had come without her lord. Was this part of the secret—a secret known to all the world? Or was his Lordship before the whole company about to lead his bride to the first place, as became her newly acquired rank? Some of the ladies regarded her with looks of hatred, the successors of the looks of scorn with which they had at first welcomed her. Most of them, however, were kindly: a tale of love always meets with a friendly reception; not a woman in the place but would have taken her place with joy unmeasured; as no other woman could, they were ready to accept their fate and to make friends with the successful and the fortunate winner of so great a prize!

It was a great prize, indeed, if they only knew!

The minuets were over and the country dances were about to begin when Lord Fylingdale arrived, followed, as usual, by his secretary. He stood at the door, he looked around; then, with the cold pride which never failed him, he stepped across the room and bowed low to Molly. 'Madam,' he said, 'with your permission, we will dance this country dance together before I take you away with me.'

'My Lord,' replied Molly aloud, so that the whole company heard and trembled, 'I shall not dance with you this evening, nor on any other evening.'

'She will never again dance with you, my Lord; nor will she hold any discourse with you; nor will she willingly

'I SHALL NOT DANCE WITH YOU THIS EVENING, NOR ON ANY OTHER EVENING.'

admit you to her presence.' It was the Vicar who spoke, because the man and the occasion proved too much for the good old Captain, who could only roll thunderously between his teeth things more fitted for the quelling of a mutiny than for dealing with such a man as his Lordship.

'Pray, sir,' said Lord Fylingdale, stepping back, 'what is the meaning of this? Pray, madam,' he turned to Molly, 'what is the meaning of this sudden change? Captain Crowle, have I, or have I not, the right to claim my wife?'

The Vicar stepped forward and confronted him. His tall, thin figure, his long cassock, his thin and ascetic face, contrasted with the over-haughtiness of his adversary.

'My Lord,' he asked, 'how long has this lady been your wife?'

'We were married,' he said, 'at six o'clock this morning, by the Reverend Mr. Benjamin Purdon, who is here to bear witness to the fact. The wedding was private at my request, because, as you may perhaps believe, I was not anxious to join in the wedding feast with a company of boors, bumpkins, and sailors.'

'Ladies and gentlemen'—the Vicar raised his voice and by a gesture silenced the orchestra—'I have to lay before you a conspiracy which I believe is unparalleled in any history. You are aware that Lord Fylingdale, who stands before you, came to the Spa a few weeks ago for purposes best known to himself. You will also doubtless remember that certain persons, who arrived before him, were loud in his praises. He was said by them to be a model of all the virtues. I will not repeat the things that were said——'

'All this,' said Lord Fylingdale, 'is beside the mark. I come to claim my wife.'

'Among those who accepted these statements for gospel was Captain Crowle, the guardian of the young lady beside

me. It was to him a great honour to be admitted to converse with so distinguished a nobleman and to be permitted to consult with him as to the affairs of his ward. He even informed his Lordship of the extent of the lady's fortune, which is far greater than was generally understood. Thereupon his Lordship began to pay attention of a marked character. You have all, I believe, remarked these attentions. Then came the attempted abduction and the lady's rescue by Lord Fylingdale. After this he formally offered his hand and his rank to the lady. The honour seemed very great. He was accepted. He then engaged the lady to undertake a private marriage without festivities, to which she consented. She promised, in fact, to be married at St. Nicholas' Church this very morning at six o'clock.'

'All this,' said Lord Fylingdale coldly, 'is quite true. Yet why you detain the company by the narrative I do not understand. The lady kept her promise. I met her at the place and time appointed. We were married. Once more, Captain Crowle, I claim my wife.'

'Ladies and gentlemen,' the Vicar continued, 'there is but one reply to the last statement, for the lady did not keep her engagement.'

'Sir,' his Lordship advanced a step, 'are you aware of the meaning of your words? Do you assert that I was not married at that time and in that place?'

The Reverend Benjamin Purdon advanced. 'Sir,' he addressed the Vicar, 'like his Lordship, I am amazed at these words. Why, sir, I myself, at six o'clock this morning, performed the marriage service, as prescribed by the Church, for the Right Honourable the Earl of Fylingdale and Miss Mary Miller.'

By this time the company were crowding round eagerly listening. No one could understand what had happened.

The bridegroom claimed his bride; the bride's friends denied that she was married.

'Yesterday,' the Vicar went on, 'there arrived, simultaneously, three letters; one of them, an anonymous letter, was addressed to Captain Crowle; one, from a respectable bookseller in London, was addressed to Mr. Pentecrosse, master of the Grammar School; and one, from a certain fellow of his college at Cambridge, was addressed to me. All these letters, together, contained charges which show how deeply we have been deceived.'

'Have a care! Have a care!' said Lord Fylingdale.

At that moment another arrival took place. It was Tom Rising, the wounded man. He was pale and weak; he leaned upon the arm of two gentlemen; he was followed by a figure strange indeed in a polite Assembly.

'By these letters and other sources,' the Vicar continued, 'I learn—first as to the noble Lord's friends—the following particulars. Pray give me your attention.

'I find that the Lady Anastasia Langston hath been lately presented by the Grand Jury of Middlesex for keeping a house riotous, of great extravagance, luxury, idleness, and ill fame. She is third on the list. The first,' the Vicar read from a paper, 'is the Lady Mordington and her gaming-house in Covent Garden; the second is the Lady Castle and her gaming-house, also in Covent Garden; and the third is the Lady Anastasia Langston and her gaming-house, in or near Hanover Square, all in this county.

'I am informed that Lady Anastasia hath held a bank every night in this place to the hurt and loss of many.

'I turn next to the case of the Reverend Benjamin Purdon, who stands before you. He was the tutor of Lord Fylingdale; he is described as the companion of his vices; he was the cause last year of a grievous scandal at Bath;

he is the author of a ribald piece of verse by which he has corrupted many. No Bishop would sanction his acceptance of the smallest preferment.'

'This is very surprising,' said Mr. Purdon, shaking his big head. 'But we shall see, we shall see, immediately.'

'There are next, the two gentlemen known as Sir Harry Malyns and Colonel Lanyon. Their occupation is to act as decoy ducks; to lure young men to the gaming-table, and to plunder them when they are caught.'

Both these gentlemen started, but neither replied.

'I now come to the noble Lord before me. He is a most notorious profligate; he shares in Lady Anastasia's gaming-house; he has long since been refused admittance into the houses of persons of honour; he is an inveterate gambler; he has ruined his own estate—sold the family plate and pictures, library, everything; he is, at this moment, unable to borrow or raise the smallest sum of money. The Fleet and the King's Bench Prisons are full of the unfortunate tradesmen who trusted him and the young rakes whom he has ruined.

'Ladies and gentlemen, this was the story which reached us yesterday, fortunately, in time. Miss Molly broke off her promise, and wrote to his Lordship for explanations. Captain Crowle called upon his Lordship this morning for explanations. He was met with derision; he was told that he was too late, the young lady was already married—there was no necessity for any explanations.'

The company murmured. Voices were raised demanding explanations.

Said his Lordship, coldly, 'These inventions need no reply. I claim my wife.'

'She is not your wife,' said the Vicar. 'We are ready to prove that at six o'clock the young lady was already engaged with her mother in the still-room, or in some

other occupations. Of that there is no doubt possible. But'—and here he lifted a warning finger, but his Lordship paid no attention—' there *was a wedding early this morning*. His reverence Mr. Purdon performed the service; the wedding was in the name of Mary Miller as bride; the registers are signed "Mary Miller." This is, therefore, a conspiracy.'

'You talk nonsense,' said his Lordship, who certainly carried it off with an amazing assurance. 'I claim my wife. Once more, madam, will you come with me?'

'I am not your wife.'

'We must endeavour,' said the Vicar, 'to find the woman who personated Miss Molly. The clerk of the parish testifies to the wedding, but he does not appear to have seen the face of the bride. Whoever she was, she wore a domino, and had thrown her hood over her face.'

The Lady Anastasia stepped forward, agitating her fan. 'Reverend Sir,' she said to the Vicar, 'in matters of society you are a very ignorant and a very simple person. It is quite true that I have been presented by a Middlesex Jury for gambling. It is also true that half London might also be presented. As for the rest of your statements, that, for instance, Lord Fylingdale shares in the profits of my bank, let me assure you that your innocence has been abused; these things are not true. However, it is not for me to answer public insults in a public place. Sir Harry, my old friend, they call you a decoy—even you, with your name and your reputation. A decoy! Sir, your cloth should shame you. Sir Harry, take me to my chair. If, to-morrow morning, the company thinks proper to dissociate itself from this public insult, I will remain in this place, where, I own, I have never found many friends. If not, I shall return to London and to the house presented by the Grand Jury of Middlesex.'

So saying, she retired smiling, and, as they say of soldiers, in good order. With her went, also in good order, the ancient beau, showing no other sign of agitation than a trembling of the knees—and this might very well be laid to the account of his three-score years and fifteen, or perhaps four-score.

At this point, however, Tom Rising, supported by his friends, advanced. 'My Lord,' he said, 'I have brought an old friend to meet you, Jack Gizzard—Honest John—the poultryman of Bond Street. You know him of old, I believe. The advantage of bringing him here to expose you is that you cannot fight a poultryman.'

I looked on in admiration. The affair could not be turned into a private quarrel, for the fellow was, indeed, no other than a dealer in poultry by trade. Yet no better witness could be produced, for no one was wider known than Jack Gizzard—so called from his trade—at all race meetings, at Newmarket, at Epsom, and at other places. He was, in fact, that rare creature, the man who, not being a gentleman, is yet admitted to the sports of gentlemen; is considered as an authority; is allowed to bet freely with them, yet remains what he was by birth, a mechanic, a shopkeeper, a farmer, a grazier, a horse-breeder, or I know not what.

I do not know his surname; he was called Gizzard on account of his calling, and Jack on account of the esteem in which he was held by all sporting men. No one knew better than Jack Gizzard how to choose, how to train, how to feed a gamecock; no one knew better the points of a horse; no one knew better how to train a dog for coursing; no one knew more of the secrets of the stable; no one knew more intimately the rules of the prize-ring, whether for quarterstaff, singlestick, or boxing. No one, again, held a better reputation for honesty in sport: he betted and he

paid; he would advise a man even to his own loss. Such a man as this Tom Rising brought to the Assembly for the discomfiture of his late adversary.

'Jack,' he said, 'here is his Lordship, and there—don't go just yet, Colonel,' for, at the sight of Jack Gizzard, Colonel Lanyon was about to leave the room. 'Not just yet. Thank you, gentlemen,' as two or three placed themselves between the Colonel and the door.

Jack Gizzard stepped forward. He was in appearance more like a butcher than anything else, being a stout, hearty-looking man, with a red face.

'My Lord,' he said, 'when you last left Newmarket Heath you owed me five hundred pounds.' Lord Fylingdale made no sign of any kind of response. 'I met you again at Bath; it was before the time when you were requested by the Master of the Ceremonies to leave the place with your friend—ah! Colonel, glad to see you—with your friend Colonel Lanyon.'

Lord Fylingdale made no sign whatever of having heard.

'Bath is not very far from Gloucestershire. I made a journey there to find out for myself your Lordship's position. I found your estate in the hands of money-lenders; every acre mortgaged; your house falling to pieces; its contents sold. You are already completely ruined. I went back to London and inquired further; you had lost your credit as well as your character. You could not show your face at the old places; the cockpit of Tothill Fields was closed to you; all the clubs of St. James's were closed to you. Your name, my Lord, stank then as badly as it stinks now.' Lord Fylingdale still paid no kind of attention. 'You may consider, my Lord, these few remarks as part payment of that five hundred pounds.' So he turned away.

'Come along, Colonel,' said Tom Rising. 'Bring the Colonel to the front. Don't be bashful, Colonel.'

Some of the gentlemen obeyed, gently pushing the Colonel to the front. 'Well, poultryman?' said the Colonel boldly.

'Well, sharper?' returned Jack Gizzard. 'Gentlemen, this fellow has been a bully about the town for twenty years and more; a bully; a common cheat and sharper. He is now altogether discredited. He was expelled from Bath with his noble patron last year. If any of you owe him money, do not pay him. He is not fit to sit down with gentlemen of honour. That is all I have to say about you, Colonel.'

'What I have to say, Colonel,' said Tom Rising, 'is that I owe you twelve hundred pounds, and if I pay you one single guinea—then——' He proceeded to imprecate the wrath of Heaven upon himself if he showed any weakness in that resolution.

Lord Fylingdale once more turned to Molly.

'Madam, for the last time——'

'Send him away—send him away,' said Molly. 'He makes me sick.'

'We deny the marriage, my Lord,' said the Vicar. 'That is all we have to say.'

'At your peril,' replied his Lordship. So saying he walked away unmoved, apparently. Mr. Purdon and Colonel Lanyon went with him; both men were flushed in the cheeks and restrained themselves by an evident effort. I was sorry for Sam Semple, for he followed, his face full of trouble and disappointment.

When they were gone, the Vicar spoke once more.

'Ladies and gentlemen,' he said, 'we have thought it best to court the greatest publicity possible in this matter. The people whom we have exposed will not again trouble

this company by their presence. I know not what the law may decide in this case, supposing his Lordship so ill-advised as to go to law. But the truth, which is above the law, remains that an imposture of the most daring kind has been attempted, and that some woman has been found to personate Miss Molly. I have to express her sorrow for keeping you so long from your pleasures.'

And with these words he offered his hand to Molly, and we withdrew, and the music struck up a lively country dance.

CHAPTER XXXVII

THE BUBBLE AND THE SKY-ROCKET

This was Molly's last appearance at the Assembly.

Next day we heard that our distinguished visitors, the Prince of Purity—or the Prince of Darkness, which you please—the Lady of the Green Cloth, Sir Harry Decoy-Duck, and Colonel Bully Barabbas, with the Reverend Ananias and the ingenious Sam, first favourite of the Muses, had all gone away — whether they went away together or separately I never heard.

The opinion of the company as to the exposure and the marriage was divided. For some thought that Molly was nothing better than a woman who did not know her own mind; that she was first dazzled and carried off her head by the brilliant offer that was dangled before her; that, on Lord Fylingdale's request, she consented to the private marriage; that she became afterwards afraid of the greatness for which she was not fitted either by birth or education, and thought to escape by hard lying and a strenuous denial of the fact. I fear that this opinion was that of the majority. For, they added, there was without any doubt a marriage; it was performed by the clergyman who, by his learning, eloquence, and piety, had made so many friends during his short stay, and it was witnessed by the parish clerk. If Molly was not the bride, who could be found so closely to resemble her as to deceive the parish clerk?

When it was objected that the private character both of his Lordship and his late tutor was of the kind publicly alleged, these philosophers asked for proof—as if proof could be adduced in a public Assembly. And they asked further if it was reasonable to suppose that an eloquent divine, whose discourses had edified so many, could possibly be the reprobate and profligate as stated by the Vicar? As for his Lordship there is, as everybody knows, an offence called *scandalum magnatum*, which renders a person who defames a peer or attacks his honour liable to prosecution, fine, and imprisonment.

'We shall presently,' they said, 'find this presumptuous Vicar haled before the courts and fined, or imprisoned, for *scandalum magnatum*.'

But the Vicar, when this was reported to him, only laughed and said he should be rejoiced to put his Lordship under examination.

Others there were, principally townsfolk, who had known Molly all her life. They agreed that she was a woman of sober mind; not given to vapours or any such feminine weaknesses; not likely to be carried away by terrors; and incapable of falsehood. If she declared that she was not married, she certainly was not married. The business might be explained in some way; but of one thing they were very sure—that Molly, since she said so, was not married. This view was strongly held by the 'Society of Lynn' at their evening meetings.

It must be owned that the departure of the vivacious and affable Lady Anastasia with that of the agreeable rattle of seventy-five, Sir Harry, and that of the pious Purdon, who had also become a favourite with the ladies, proved a heavy blow to the gaieties of the Assembly and the Long Room. The Card Room was deserted; conversation in the Gardens and the Pump Room became flat;

the gentlemen who had gambled at the hazard-table now carried on their sport—perhaps less dangerously—at the tavern; many of them, having lost a great deal more than they could afford, were now gloomy; there were no more public breakfasts; no more water-parties up or down the river; no more bowls of punch after the dance. In a word, the spirit went out of the company; the Spa became dull.

Let me finish with the story of this mushroom. I call it a mushroom because it appeared, grew, and vanished in a single season. You may also call it a sky-rocket if you please, or, indeed, anything which springs into existence in a moment, and in a moment dies. Perhaps we may liken it most to a bubble such as boys blow from soap-suds. It floated in the sunshine for a brief space, glowing with the colours of the rainbow; then it burst and vanished, leaving nothing behind but the memory of it.

The company, I say, after the departure of the party from London, became almost immediately dull and out of spirits. The music alone was gay; many of the ladies lamented loudly that they had ever come to a place where the nightly gambling had played havoc with their husbands, fathers, or sons. They found out that the lodgings were cramped, dirty, ill-furnished, inconvenient, and exorbitant in their cost; that the provisions were dear; that they had already taken the waters for a month or more; and that, in effect, it was high time to go home. Besides, their own houses in the summer, the season of fruit and flowers, with their orchards and their gardens, were certainly more attractive than the narrow streets and the confined air of Lynn.

Therefore, some making this excuse and some that, they all with one consent began to pack up their baggage and to go home.

The departure of our friends from London took place in the middle of June; by the end of June the season was over—the visitors gone. At first the people expected new arrivals, but there were none—the season was over. The Market Place for a while was crowded with the women who brought their poultry and fruit and provisions from the country. When they found that no one came to buy, they gradually ceased to appear. Great was the lamentation over the abundance which was wasted, and the produce of their gardens doomed to ripen and to rot.

Then the strolling players put their dresses and properties into a waggon and went away complaining that they were half starved, which was, I dare say, the simple truth. Next, all the show folk and the quacks, and the Cheap Jacks and tumblers and Tom Fools went away too, and the gipsies brought in no more horses, and the streets became once more silent and deserted, save on the quays and on the river, just as they had been before the Spa was opened.

And then the music and the Horns were sent away; the Master of the Ceremonies received his salary and went back to Norwich; the Gardens were closed; the dippers vanished; the Pump Room was left for any who chose to dip and draw for themselves; the hairdressers, milliners, vendors of cosmetics, powders, paint, and patches all vanished as by magic; the coffee-houses were closed; the bookseller carried his books back to Cambridge or wherever he came from; the confectioner left off making his famous cakes; and the morning prayers were once more read to a congregation of one or two.

The townsfolk, then, having nothing else to do, began to count their gains. The Doctor, you remember, prophesied at the outset that all would become rich. What happened was that everybody had made large gains. The

takings of the shops had been far greater than they had at any previous time hoped for or experienced. On the other hand, the shopkeepers had laid in large and valuable stocks which now seemed likely to remain on their hands. Moreover, as always happens, the temporary prosperity had been taken for a continuing, or even an increasing prosperity, with the consequence that the people had launched out into an extravagant way of living, the smallest shopkeeper demanding mutton and beef instead of the fat pork and hot milk which had formerly been counted a good dinner, drinking the wine of Lisbon and Madeira where he formerly drank small ale, and even taking his dish of tea in the afternoon for the good of his megrims and the clearance of his ill humours.

Oh! but the next year would bring another flood of fortune; they could wait. Therefore they passed the winter in such habits of profuseness as I have indicated. Spring arrived, and they began to furbish their lodgings anew and to look to their stores and stocks. The month of May brought warmth and sunshine, but it did not bring the expected company. May passed; June passed. To the unspeakable consternation of the town, no visitors came at all—none. With one consent all stayed at home or went elsewhere. I have never heard any explanation of this remarkable falling off. That is to say, there were many reasons offered, but none that seemed sufficient. Thus, the ladies of Norfolk had taken a holiday which was costly, and could not be repeated every year. It was like a visit to London, which is made once in a life and is talked about for the rest of that life. Or the losses of the gentlemen at the gaming-table frightened them, they would not again be led into temptation; or the grand invention of Sam Semple had been blown upon, and the rheumatic and the gouty who had taken the waters now

found that they were in no way the better; or the scandal of those conspirators in high rank drove people away—indeed, such an exposure could do no good to any place of resort.

There were, therefore, after the event, many explanations offered, and everyone may choose for himself. It is, however, certain that no visitors came; that the Pump Room was deserted, save for the few people of the town; that there was no need to engage music or to provide provisions or do anything, for no one came. The Spa had enjoyed its brief hour of popularity, and was now dead.

This was a blow to the town, from which it was slow, indeed, to recover. Many of the shopkeepers were unable to pay their rents or to sell their stocks. Simplicity of manners returned with the fat pork and the hot milk; and as for the promised accession of wealth, I believe that the Spa left our people poorer than it found them.

I have been told that this has been the fate of many Spas. First there is a blind belief in the sovereign virtue of the well; at the outset the place is crowded with visitors; there is every kind of amusement and pleasure; then this confidence becomes less and presently vanishes altogether, and is transferred to some other well. As faith decays so the company grows thinner and less distinguished. There was formerly, I believe, a fashionable Spa near London, at a place called Hampstead. This Spa had such a rise, such a period of prosperity, and such a fall. Another Spa which also rose, flourished and then decayed and is now deserted, was the Spa of Epsom, a village some miles south of London. These places, however, lasted more than a single season. Our Spa lived but for two or three short months and then passed away. To be sure, it was a pretence and a sham from the outset, but

people did not know its origin; Sam Semple, its sole creator, remained unknown and unsuspected.

I know not, I say, how the belief in the Doctor's well came so suddenly to an end. I do know, however, that the disappointment of the Doctor, and, with him, all who let lodgings, kept taverns, provided victuals, and sold things of any kind, was very bitter when the next spring brought no company. They waited, I say, expectant, all through the summer. When it became quite certain that the Spa was really dead, they began sorrowfully to pull down the rooms and to take away the fence, and they left the Gardens to weeds and decay. And then the town relapsed once more into its former, and present, condition. That is to say, it became unknown to the fashionable world; the gentry of Norfolk resorted to Norwich again; they forgot that they once came to Lynn; the place lies in a corner with the reclaimed marshes on either hand; it is inaccessible except to those whose business takes them there; travellers do not visit the town; it is not like Harwich, or Dover, or Hull, a place which carries on communication by packet with foreign countries; it is a town shrunken within its former limits, its courts encumbered with deserted and ruinous houses, its streets quiet and silent. Yet it is prosperous in a quiet way; it has its foreign trade, its port, and its shipping; its merchants are substantial; the life which they lead is monotonous, but they do not feel the monotony. Except for an occasional riot among drunken sailors, there is no work for the Justices of the Peace, and no occupants of the prison. At least we have no great lady using her charms, her gracious smiles, her rank, in order to lure our young men to their destruction; we have no profligate parsons; we have no noble lords parading in the borrowed plumes of saint and confessor.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

THE OPINION OF COUNSEL

Meantime we waited expectant, and in uncertainty. It was possible that the pretended husband would withdraw his claims and that nothing more would be heard of him. It was possible, I say, if we supposed the pretender capable of honour, shame, or pride, that he would say, in so many words: 'You deny the marriage; very well, I will not claim a wife who says that she is no wife.' It was, however, far more probable that he would claim his wife and exercise his rights over her property. What should then be done?

The subject exercised the 'Society' greatly; every evening the situation was considered from all possible points of view, and always as to the best manner of protecting Molly. It was at this time that the Vicar wrote out the statement which he afterwards laid before counsel in London in order to obtain an opinion on its legal aspect.

The case drawn up by him was as follows:

1. There was a betrothal between the two parties A. (standing for Lord Fylingdale) and B. (standing for Molly).

2. It is not denied that a private marriage had been agreed upon by both parties.

3. The marriage was to take place on a certain morning at the time of six at a certain church. B. undertook to

wear a certain pink silk cloak with a hood drawn over her head, and a domino to conceal her face, so that the people of the town should not recognise her and crowd into the church.

4. At the appointed hour of six A. presented himself at the church.

5. At the same hour a woman also presented herself, dressed as had been arranged, wearing a domino to prevent recognition in the street, and a cloak of pink silk with a hood.

6. The marriage ceremony was performed by a clergyman in due form and on the production of a license by A.

7. The marriage was duly entered in the register and signed, the woman signing in the name of B.

8. There was present at the wedding, besides the clergyman, the parish clerk, who gave away the bride, read the responses, and signed as witness.

9. Part of the ceremony, including the essential words, was witnessed by one John Pentecrosse, mate of the *Lady of Lynn.*

10. Since A. had no reason to suppose that B. would not keep her promise, it would seem impossible for him to have found at the last moment some other woman to personate B.

This was the case for A., put as strongly and as plainly as possible. I confess that when I read it I was staggered by the case, especially by the last clause. Certainly, as I had not delivered Molly's letter, A. had no reason for supposing that B. would fail to keep her promise, and therefore no reason for suborning some other woman into a conspiracy.

However, then followed Molly's case:

1. She had accepted A.'s offer of marriage.

2. She had promised to meet A. at 6 a.m.

3. She had received, the evening before this promise was to be kept, information which represented A. in a light that made it impossible for a virtuous woman to marry him.

4. This information was embodied in three letters, addressed respectively to the Vicar, to the Schoolmaster, and to Captain Crowle. They can be produced in evidence.

5. On receipt of this information she wrote a letter to A. stating that she must have full explanation as to the charges brought against him before proceeding further in the business.

6. This letter was not delivered, the bearer having his mind full of other points connected with the affair.

7. At half-past five B. left her room and joined her mother in certain household work. Nor did she leave her mother during the morning. This fact is attested by the mother and a certain black woman, B.'s servant.

8. The only way out of the house into the street is by the garden. Captain Crowle was walking in the garden from half-past five till seven, and saw no one leave the house.

9. At seven or thereabouts the musicians, with the butchers, arrived to congratulate the bride, and were sent away by Captain Crowle.

10. Later on, A.'s secretary arrived with a message from A. He was informed by B. that no marriage had taken place.

11. Captain Crowle then waited on A. and demanded explanations. He received answer that, having married the lady, A. was not called upon to give any explanations.

12. In the evening, before the whole company at the Assembly, the Vicar charged A. with many acts unworthy of a man of honour, and, among other things, with

having conspired with a woman unknown to personate B. and to set up the pretence of a marriage.

Opinion was asked as to the position of B. Would she be considered in the eyes of the law as a married woman? Had A. any rights over her or her property? Could she marry another man? What steps should she take to protect herself and her property? Observe, that unless B. could be declared not to be the wife of A. she could not alienate, give away, or part with any of her property; she could not marry; she was doomed to be a wife at the mercy of a man more pitiless than a tiger, yet not a wife, for she would die rather than marry him. She must wait until Heaven should take pity upon her and despatch this man. Such men, it is observed, do never live long, but they may live long enough to inflict irreparable mischief upon their unfortunate victims.

Molly read the case thus drawn up very carefully. 'My only trust,' she said, 'is in the evidence of mother and Nigra. I confess that I cannot understand how, without knowing that I should fail, he could possibly procure that woman to personate me. Has he the power of working miracles?'

'There is no miracle here,' I said, 'except the miracle of wickedness greater than would be thought possible. Patience, Molly! Sooner or later we shall find it out.'

'It will be later, I fear.'

'There are three at least in the plot. The clerk has been deceived; Sam Semple has not been consulted. These are the three—Lord Fylingdale, the parson, who is, doubtless, well paid for his villainy, and the woman, whoever she may be. We shall find out the truth through the woman.'

'Since his marriage would give him the command of

my property, Jack, and since he is ruined, why does he make no sign?'

This was a week or two after the event. I suppose that Lord Fylingdale was making himself assured as to the strength of his position and his rights. However, we were not to wait very long.

'I am of opinion,' said the Vicar, after many discussions on the case thus drawn out, 'that we should lay the facts before some counsel learned in the law, and ascertain our position. If we are to contest the claim in court, we have, at least, the money to spend upon it.'

'We will spend,' said the Captain, 'our last penny upon it.' He meant the last penny of his ward's fortune, in which, as you will hear, he was quite wrong, because he had now no power to spend any of it.

It was, therefore, determined that the Vicar should undertake the journey to London; that my father should accompany him; that they should not only obtain the advice and opinion of a lawyer, but that they should ascertain, through the bookseller, my father's cousin, or any other person, what they could concerning the private life of his Lordship. 'There is no saying what we may discover,' said the Vicar. 'How if there is another wife still living? Even a noble lord cannot have two wives at the same time.'

It seems strange that one must make greater preparations for a journey to London by land than a voyage to Lisbon by sea. As regards the latter, my kit is put together in an hour or two, and I am then ready to embark. But as regards the former, these two travellers first considered the easiest way; then the cost of the journey, and that of their stay in London; then the departure of others, so as to form a company against highway robbers; they then arranged for the halting and

resting-places; hired their horses, for they were to ride all the way; engaged a servant; made their wills, and so at last were ready to begin the journey. Their company consisted of two or three riders to merchants of London, who travel all over the country visiting the shopkeepers in the interests of their masters. They are excellent fellow-travellers, being accustomed to the road, having no fear of highwaymen, knowing the proper charges that should be made at the roadside inns, and knowing as well, what each house can be best trusted to provide, the home-brewed ale being good at one house, and the wine at another—and so forth. They reckoned five days for the journey if the weather continued fine—it was then July, and the height of summer. The Vicar thought that perhaps a week or ten days would suffice for their business in town, and therefore we might expect them back in three weeks. Captain Crowle would have gone with them, but was fearful of losing his ward. For the first time in his life he barred and bolted his doors at night, and if he went abroad he left his house in the custody of his gardener, a stout country lad who would make a sturdy fight in case of any attempt at violence. But violence was not a weapon which was in favour with his Lordship. And if it had been, the whole town would have risen in defence of Molly.

For three weeks, therefore, we waited. I, for my part, in greater anxiety than the rest, because my ship had now received her cargo, and I feared that we should have to weigh anchor and slip down the river before the return of our messengers. And at this time, when we knew not what would happen or what we should do, many wild schemes came into my head. We would carry the girl away; we would foreclose her mortgages, sell her lands, and carry her fortune with her; we would sail in one of

her own ships across the Atlantic, and make a new home for her in the American colonies. However, in the end we had, as you shall learn, to accept misfortune and to resign ourselves to what promised to be a lifelong penalty inflicted for no sins of Molly's—who was as free from sin as any woman, not a saint, can hope to be—but by the wickedness of a man whose life and ways were far removed from Molly, and might have been supposed to be incapable of afflicting her in any way.

Our friends, therefore, started on their journey, arriving in due time at London, when they began their business without delay. Briefly, they were recommended to a very learned counsel, old, and in great practice, whose opinions were more highly valued than those perhaps of any other lawyer. He was avaricious, and it was necessary to pay him a very handsome fee before he would consider the case. When he accepted the fee he gave it his most careful consideration. His opinion was as follows:

'The fact that there was a marriage between A. and some woman—B. or another—is undoubted. The evidence of the parish clerk may be set aside except to prove this fact, because it does not appear that the bride removed her domino. It might, however, become a part of B.'s case that the clergyman did not witness the removal of the domino. What the clerk saw was a woman dressed in a pink silk cloak with a hood over her head, and a domino concealing her face, who signed the name of Mary Miller. For the same reason the evidence of John Pentecrosse rests only on the dress of the bride, and may therefore be taken as worth that and no more.

'At the same time the dress of the bride is important. A. had no intimation of B.'s refusal to keep her promise. At six o'clock, as is allowed, he presented himself. If B. was not there, how should he be able, at a moment's

notice, to procure a woman to personate her, wearing a cloak of the same colour as B.'s, and ready to sign her name falsely? The theory is impossible, for it demands a whole chain of fortuitous occurrences and coincidences, as that A. should find a woman of abandoned character accidentally near the church, ready to commit this crime, dressed as B. was expected to dress, and considered worthy of trust with so great a secret. On the other hand, we have evidences of an apparently conclusive kind. B.'s guardian, who was taking the morning air in his garden, says positively that no one left the house. B.'s mother and her black servant declare that B. was in the kitchen with them all the morning. This, I say, seems at first conclusive. But the Court would probably hold that a mother's evidence is likely to be in the supposed interests of her child, while a negress would be expected, if she were attached to her mistress, to give any evidence that she thought likely to be of service or was directed to give.

'The case is remarkable, and, so far as I know, without precedent. It is supported on either side by flat assertions which are either true or deliberate perjuries. As regards the bad character of A., I think it would have very little weight. Setting aside, that is, his evil reputation, which might perhaps taint his evidence, and also setting aside the partiality of a mother, which might also, perhaps, taint her evidence, we have the broad and simple facts that A. had no warning of B.'s intention to keep away; that he presented himself according to arrangement; that he was met by a woman dressed exactly as had been arranged with B.; that they were married; and that the register was signed by the woman in the name of B.

'I am of opinion, therefore, that if this case is brought into court there will be pleadings on either side of great interest, and that the Court will decide in favour of A.;

that if the case goes up for appeal it will again be decided in favour of A.; and that if the case were taken up to the Lords that Court would also decide in favour of A.

'If action is taken it must be at the cost and charge of the guardian, because the lady's property, in default of settlements, would, in the event which I think probable, fall into the hands of A., thus adjudged to be her husband.

'I advise, therefore, that submission be made to A.; that even though B. continues to deny the marriage, A. shall be invited to make her a suitable provision, and shall undertake not to molest her or compel her to leave her guardian and to live with him.'

With this opinion to guide him, the Vicar wrote to Lord Fylingdale asking for an interview.

He was received with a show of cold politeness. 'You have given me reason, sir, to remember your face. However, I pass over the injuries which you allowed yourself to utter. You are come, I presume, in the name of my unfortunate wife, who, for some reason unknown to me, denies her own marriage. Well, sir, your message?'

'My message, my Lord, is briefly this: We have taken counsel's opinion on this business.'

'So have I.'

'It is, on the whole, to the effect that if we dispute your Lordship's claims we shall probably lose.'

'My own counsel is also of that opinion.'

'For my own part I shall advise my friends to accept what seems impossible to deny.'

'You will do well. I shall be pleased, I confess, to see the business settled without taking it into court.'

'I should like, if possible, to carry home with me some concessions of your Lordship in response to this submission.'

'What concessions? It seems to me that the Countess has no right to insist upon any concession. The whole of her property, as you know, is my own.'

'I fear that is the case.'

'I shall probably make certain changes in the administration of the property, now my property. I shall relieve the worthy Captain of its control. As regards any other point, you must acknowledge that you have treated me with insults intolerable; you are not in a position to make terms. But what do you ask?'

'First, freedom from personal molestation.'

'That is granted at once. You may tell the Countess that on no consideration will I see her, nor shall I exercise any marital rights. When she consents to confess her falsehood, and to ask pardon for her offences, I may perhaps extend my personal protection, not otherwise.'

'As for her allowance—her maintenance?'

'Your Reverence is not serious. She says that she is not my wife. The law says, or is prepared to say, that she is. By the law I am compelled to maintain her. Let her therefore invoke the intervention of the law. To procure this she will have to confess her many perjuries. Till then, nothing. Do you understand, sir? Nothing!'

CHAPTER XXXIX

THE FRUITS OF SUBMISSION

'Molly, my dear.' The Captain's voice was broken. 'It is my doing—mine. I am an old fool. Yet I thought I was doing the best for you.'

'Nay,' said Molly. 'It is no one's fault. It is my great misfortune.'

'Must he take all?' asked the Captain.

'He will take all he can claim,' the Vicar answered. 'Revenge, as well as cupidity, is in his mind. I read it through the cold mask of pride with which he covers his face and tries to conceal himself. He will be revenged. He is like unto Lucifer for pride, and unto Belial for wickedness. Molly, my dear, I fear thou wilt soon be poor indeed in worldly goods. The Lord knoweth what is best. He leaveth thee, still, the friends who love thee.'

The mother resumed the lamentations which she never ceased.

'Molly is a widow who cannot marry again—Molly is a wife without a husband. Oh, Molly! My poor Molly!'

'It grieves me sore,' said the Vicar, 'to counsel submission. Yet what could we do? How can we explain this great mystery that he who knew not your change of purpose should in a moment be able to substitute, in your place, at the hour fixed, a woman dressed and masked as had been arranged? There is no explanation possible,

and I understand very clearly that this fact outweighs all the evidence on either side. There is nothing to be done. We must submit, saving only your personal freedom, Molly. The man confesses that he has no wish to molest you, and nothing to gain by any molestation. To be sure, without it he can take what he pleases. Your presence, indeed, would be a hindrance and a reproach to his mode of life.'

So we talked together, with sadness and heaviness. Yet for one thing I was well pleased; that Molly had not been forced into daily companionship with this man. For that would have killed her—body and soul, if a soul can be destroyed by despair and misery and cruelty.

'Courage, Molly!' We were on the point of weighing anchor—and we stood on the quay to say farewell. 'Things will get right, somehow. Oh! I know they will. I cannot tell how I know. Perhaps we shall find the woman. Then we shall explain the mystery and expose the cheat. Perhaps—but we know not what may happen. As for your fortune, Molly, that is as good as gone; but you yourself remain, and you are far more precious than all the gold and silver in the land.'

So we parted, and for six months, until our return, I knew nothing of what was done.

You may easily guess what was done.

First of all, a letter came from London. It was addressed to Captain Crowle, and it called upon him to prepare the books and accounts connected with the estate of Mary, Countess of Fylingdale, for the information of the Right Honourable the Earl of Fylingdale. It was written by an attorney, and it announced the intention of the writer to send down a person—one Stephen Bisse, attorney-at-law—duly authorized to examine and to audit the accounts, and to make known his Lordship's intentions as regards the administration of the estate.

The Captain, ignorant of the law, took the letter to the Vicar for advice.

'This,' said the latter, 'may be simply a first step to taking over the whole of the property, or it may be the first step towards a system of revenge and persecution. For if the attorney who comes here to investigate the accounts finds anything irregular, we may be trapped into legal expenses, and Heaven knows what to follow.'

The Captain, however, had not commanded a ship in vain; for the commanding officer of a ship must keep the log and all the papers connected with the cargo, lading, and unlading, pay of the ship's company, port dues, and everything. He must, in a word, be as methodical in his accounts as any quill-driver ashore.

'He may examine my accounts as much as he pleases, he declared. 'They are all right.'

'Nevertheless, friend, be advised. Place the whole business in the hands of one who knows the law. In the end it may be far cheaper.'

In every port there must be one or more persons skilled in that part of the law which concerns trade and commerce, imports and exports, customs, excise, and harbour dues, At Lynn there was such an one, attorney and notary; a man of great probity and responsibility—Mr. Nathaniel Redman by name. To him the Captain entrusted the papers of the estate. These papers, which had been accumulating for eighteen years, and represented the increase and the administration of a very large estate, were now voluminous to the highest degree. The mere perusal of them would entail the labour of many attorneys for many weeks, while the audit of the whole, bit by bit, would engage the same persons many months, or even years.

'The Earl of Fylingdale will have the accounts audited,

will he?' said Mr. Redman. 'Then his Lordship is in no immediate want of money.'

'Why? Cannot he take what he wants?'

'Sir, you are the lady's guardian; you have to be released from your trust before you hand over the property. Without such a release you will keep the whole. That means, that his Lordship must wait for the long and tedious business of a complete audit. I say long and tedious, because, if the examination of accounts is undertaken in a spirit of hostility, we can raise in our turn objection after objection by going back to the commencement of the trust. In other words, Captain, if your papers are all preserved, which I doubt not, we shall be in a position to delay the acquisition of the estate by the Earl almost indefinitely.'

'But at whose charge?' asked the Vicar. 'For the Captain has no means of paying heavy expenses.'

'At the charge of the estate. Oh! sir, do not think that an attorney of London, to say nothing of myself, would embark upon so large a business save at the charge of the estate itself.'

'It is, then, in your interest to prolong this examination into the accounts?'

'It is, most certainly, in the interest of this gentleman from London and of myself; but,' he sighed heavily, 'if all reports are true, I do not believe that Lord Fylingdale will prolong the inquiry.'

The person who was promised presently arrived with his credentials. He was quite a young man, apparently about two or three and twenty; his letter to Captain Crowle described him as an attorney-at-law. He was quick of speech and of the greatest possible assurance in manner. In appearance he was small of stature, pasty-faced, and with a turned-up nose, the possession of which should be regarded by the owner as a misfortune and personal defect,

like a round back. It is said, on the other hand, to be an indication of great self-conceit.

He came, therefore, was set down at the 'Crown,' and inquired for the residence of Captain Crowle, on whom he called without delay.

The Captain received him in his summer-house. He read the letter introducing and describing him. Then he laid it down and looked at his visitor cursorily. 'Oh!' he said, 'you are the attorney of Lord Fylingdale, are you, and you want to make an audit of my accounts? You've come all the way from London on purpose to make that audit, have you? Well, sir, you will carry this letter to Mr. Nathaniel Redman, and you will give it to him.'

'Who is Mr. Redman? I know of no Redman in this business.'

'He is an attorney-at-law, like yourself, young man, and he is a notary, and this job is turned over to him.'

'Oh! I understood, Captain Crowle, that I should confer with you personally.'

'Did you so? Well, sir, if you will see Mr. Redman you can confer with him instead. The job is his.'

The Captain, in fact, had been warned not to make any communications or to hold any conversation with the attorney. He felt himself only safe, therefore, in repeating that the job was Mr. Redman's.

'We may, however, come to some preliminary, arrangement Captain Crowle. The estate now——'

The Captain waved his hand in the direction of the garden door. 'The job, young man, is Mr. Redman's. There is your letter. Take it to him.'

Mr. Bisse accordingly retired and repaired to the office and residence of Mr. Redman—to whom he gave his letter.

'We shall have no difficulties, I presume,' he said.

'I hope not.'

'Of course, I know the law in these matters—I can direct you——'

'Young gentleman'—Mr. Redman was well stricken in years—'I could direct your father. But go on. You will proceed in accordance with your powers. I shall take good care that you keep within your powers. Now, sir, what do you propose?'

Mr. Redman spoke from the commanding position of an armchair before a large table; he was also a large and imposing man to look at; while Mr. Bisse stood before him, small and insignificant, his original impudence fast deserting him. As for Mr. Redman, his professional pride was aroused; this young Skip Jack dared to direct *him* in matters of law, did he?

'I am, I confess,' said Mr. Bisse, 'disappointed to find that my noble client's advances are received with suspicion. I hoped that Captain Crowle would have met me in a spirit of confidence.'

'Come, sir, between ourselves, what has your noble client to complain of? He sends an attorney here. Captain Crowle meets him in the person of an attorney.'

'Well, it matters not. Captain Crowle has, no doubt, reasons of his own for his action. We must, however, since we are men of business, as you say, demand an exact audit. The interests involved are, I understand, very considerable?'

'They are very considerable.'

'I shall, however, ask for an advance of ten thousand pounds to be made to his Lordship on account.'

'An advance? The guardian to advance money before you have audited the accounts? My dear sir, are you serious?'

'You admit that there will be a great deal more than ten thousand pounds.'

'I admit nothing that is not proved.'

'Then you refuse to give my client anything?' His air of assurance began to desert him. In fact, he had been especially charged to open the proceedings by demanding such an advance.

'We refuse to do anything illegal. The papers will show the extent and the nature of the estate. You can then claim the whole. But you must first send in your claim and be prepared with the release.'

Mr. Bisse hesitated. 'My instructions are to demand a strict scrutiny of all the accounts.'

'They are waiting for you. Would you like to see the papers?' Mr. Redman led him into an adjoining room where on shelves and on the tables the books and papers were laid out in order—tied up and labelled. 'My clerk,' said Mr. Redman, 'will go through these papers with you. I shall look on.'

'All these papers?' Mr. Bisse gazed with dismay upon the piles before him.

'You will have to peruse, to examine, to pass every scrap of paper in this room. Captain Crowle, sir, is the most methodical man in the world.'

'All these papers? But it will take months.'

'Years, perhaps. You have your instructions.'

'Sir,' said Mr. Bisse, crestfallen, 'I must write to my principals for further instructions.'

'That will probably be your best course. Good-morning, sir.'

Mr. Bisse wrote accordingly. Meanwhile he made another attempt to assert his authority. He went to the Quay, looked about him with satisfaction at the proofs and evidences of brisk trade, and entered the counting-house where the clerks were at work.

'My name,' he said pompously, 'is Bisse, Mr. Stephen

Bisse, attorney-at-law. I am here as attorney for the Right Honourable the Earl of Fylingdale.'

'What do you want?' asked the chief clerk.

'You will at once show me your ledgers, your day-books, and the books used by you in your daily business.'

'You must go to Mr. Redman, sir. His office is beside the Custom House. Without his permission we can do nothing for you.'

Mr. Redman had been before him, you see.

'You refuse me at your peril,' said Mr. Bisse. 'I am——'

'You will go out of the counting-house, sir,' said the chief clerk, 'and you will leave the quay. We take our orders from Mr. Redman in place of Captain Crowle.'

So Mr. Bisse departed. He walked from the quay to the Common Stathe, and there, looking at the ships lying moored in the stream, he asked a waterman if by chance any of them belonged to Captain Crowle.

The man pointed to one. 'Then,' said Mr. Bisse, 'take me to that ship.'

Mr. Redman had been before him here as well. He climbed up the ladder and was about to step on the deck when the mate accosted him.

'What is your business, friend?' he asked.

Mr. Bisse replied as he had done in the counting-house.

'Well, sir,' said the mate, 'you can't come aboard here. Strangers are not allowed aboard this ship without an order from Captain Crowle or Mr. Redman.'

So Mr. Bisse had to go ashore again.

He found, I fear, the town of Lynn inhospitable. In fact, everybody was in favour of Molly, and the name of Lord Fylingdale stank. No one would speak to him. He wandered about waiting for a reply to his letter asking for further instructions in a disconsolate and crestfallen

spirit, very different from the confident assurance which he had shown on his arrival.

His new instructions reached him in about ten days. Again he waited on Mr. Redman.

'Well, sir?' asked the latter. 'You are come to direct me in matters of law?'

'I have received new instructions,' the young man put the question aside, 'from my principals. They are to the effect that if you will draw up for me a schedule of the whole estate, I am to forward it to London, and to receive orders thereupon as to what part of the accounts I must specially examine.'

'Sir, at the outset I refuse to accept anything but a general release. You will represent to your principals that every part of this complicated estate is involved with the whole transactions which precede it. That is to say, every purchase of a farm or a house has to be made by combined savings from every source of income, consequently, any special line of investigation will necessitate a wide and prolonged examination.'

'I perceive that you are determined to give us trouble.'

'Not so, sir. We are determined to resist persecution. Your instructions, if I understand them aright, were to fix upon Captain Crowle some difficulty, and, if possible, to accuse him of malversation.' Mr. Bisse changed colour. That was, in fact, the secret instruction. 'Now, sir, we have all our papers in order, and you will find it impossible, while I stand at your elbow, to discover or invent a loophole. At the same time, I shall prolong the investigation if you once enter upon it as much as possible. You may inform your principals of this, and you will return as soon as you have further instructions.'

'Will you not, at least, prepare a schedule of the property?'

'Certainly. You shall have this prepared in readiness for your next visit, which will be, I suppose, in another ten days. I hope you find your stay pleasant.'

'No, sir, it is not pleasant. At the inn the people are barely civil, and I am treated everywhere as if I were a Frenchman.'

'No; not a Frenchman, but the attorney of Lord Fylingdale.'

Mr. Redman addressed himself, therefore, with the aid of the Captain, to the schedule. The estate was far greater than he had anticipated.

'Why,' he said, 'are you surprised that a noble Earl should marry this girl for her money? Had the world suspected the truth, there would have been an abduction every week.' He then proceeded to go through the long list of lands, houses, mortgages, money lying idle, jewels, and everything. 'The only charge upon the estate seems to be an annuity of £150 a year for the mother. What money have you taken for maintenance?'

'Why, none.'

'None? Did the girl live on air? And what for your own services?'

'Nothing; we lived rent free. It is Molly's own house; and her mother's money kept the household.'

'Well, but—Captain—the thing is incredible. You have conducted the whole business from the death of Molly's father to the present day actually for nothing!'

'It was for the little maid.'

'Captain, you have acted, I dare say, for the best. But with submission, you have acted like a fool. However, it is not too late to remedy. I shall charge the estate, which will now become Lord Fylingdale's, with £300 a year, your salary for administering the estate and for managing the business. It will be impossible to refuse

this claim, and I shall set down £150 a year for the maintenance of your ward.'

The Captain stared. Here was a turning of the tables with a vengeance.

'The claim is just, reasonable, and moderate. I shall not advance it as a thing to be objected to. You will, meantime, go through the accounts; take out £450 a year; this for eighteen years would be £8,100; but the money must be considered as used for investments. You will, therefore, set apart £450 a year, and as soon as that amounts to a sufficient sum to be represented by an investment, you will set apart that piece of property as your own. This will represent a much larger sum than £8,100. Your ward will not, after all, be left penniless if you bequeath her your money. Ha! the young man is going to direct *me* in matters of law—*me*, is he?'

In fact, the Captain was so simple that it had never occurred to him that he could take a salary for his conduct of the business; or that he could ask for an allowance for the maintenance of his ward, and this timely discovery by the attorney in the end saved Molly from poverty, and left her still, in comparison with most girls of the place or of the county, a very considerable heiress.

When Mr. Bisse, a few days later, arrived with his instructions, he found drawn up for him a statement for the eighteen years of the captain's trusteeship. On the working side of the account was shown a charge of £150 a year as provided by the will of Molly's father for his widow for life; a similar sum for the maintenance of the ward, and a salary of £300 to Captain Crowle for managing the business in the name of the firm as shippers and general merchants. Mr. Stephen Bisse, by this time, had quite lost his assurance. He attempted no objections. 'I suppose,' he said, 'you will allow me an inspection of the books.'

'Certainly. You will, however, find them difficult to make out. Are you acquainted with the routine work of a counting-house?'

Mr. Bisse owned that he was not. 'I shall be asked,' he said, 'if I have examined the books.'

'You shall examine what you please.' Mr. Redman understood by this time the character of this young attorney. 'The chief clerk of the counting-house shall be with you to answer any questions you please to ask.'

He had come to Lynn, you see, by order of his principals, instructed that the guardian was an old addle-headed sailor, whose accounts would certainly prove liable to question and very likely open to dispute and to claims; he was aware that the noble client desired nothing so much as to ruin this old sailor; that he was also in great necessities for want of money; and that he was anxious, for some reason unknown to his attorney, that the question of the validity of the marriage should not be raised or tried in open court. But he had been met by a man of law and by accounts of a most complicated kind, and by the direct refusal to part with any money until a final release had been obtained for the guardian. He, therefore, referred to his principals twice. On the second occasion he was told that his Lordship could not wait; that he was to guard against fraud by such an examination of the books as was possible; that he was to get rid of the guardian, grant the release if the accounts allowed him to do so, lay hands on all the moneys available, and report progress.

This, in short, he did. The amended schedule reserved property amounting in value to £450 a year as invested year after year, and therefore at something like compound interest, so that this deduction gave the Captain personal and real property representing some £12,000. The rest was acknowledged to be property of the ward, and there-

fore, assuming the marriage to be valid, under the control of my Lord Fylingdale.

The auditor went to the counting-house and called for the books. He opened one or two at random; he looked wise; he made a note or two, for show; he asked a question or two, for pretence, and he went away.

This done, he repaired to Mr. Redman's office again and tendered a full release to Captain Crowle for his trusteeship. The document in which Molly was called by her maiden name, and not by that of the Countess of Fylingdale, when it was signed and sealed, rendered the old man free of any persecution; but it left the estate entirely in the hands of the pretended husband.

'You are aware, sir, of course,' said Mr. Bisse, 'that this release accepted by Captain Crowle also accepts the truth of my client's statements as regards his marriage.'

'We are not going to dispute the fact. We have our opinion, but the weight of evidence and presumption is against us. As his Lordship only wants the fortune he can take it. May I ask what you are instructed to do about it?'

'My instructions are first to receive all moneys in hand, save what is wanted for current expenses in conducting the business.'

'You will see what Captain Crowle has in his strong room. You can take that money to-day if you please.'

'And next, all the jewels, gold chains, bracelets, etc., belonging to the Countess.'

'You can have them also.'

'As regards the lands, houses, mortgages, and the business, my Lord will consider what is best to be done. I am directed to find some person of integrity in the place who will receive the rents and carry on the business. I fear I cannot ask for your assistance.'

'You can, and may. It is still our interest that the

affairs of the firm shall be well managed. The chief clerk in the counting-house is the best man you can appoint. He now receives £90 a year. You can give him what the Captain had, £300.'

'I do not know how long the arrangement will last.'

'You mean that your client will probably waste and squander the whole.'

'I desire to speak of that nobleman with respect. He is, however, in expenditure even more profuse than becomes his high rank.'

Molly shed no tears over the loss of her jewels. She brought the box down with her own hands; she opened it, took out the contents to be verified by the inventory, shut and locked it, and gave the attorney the key. The Captain led him downstairs to the cellar, in the wall of which a cupboard had been constructed, which with a stone in front, removable with a little trouble, formed a strong room. Here were the boxes of guineas waiting to be invested or employed. I know not how many there were, but Mr. Bisse carried all away with him.

When he departed the next day for London he was escorted by four stout fellows armed with cudgels and pistols riding beside his post-chaise. However, he reached London in safety and delivered his prize.

'I wonder,' said Mr. Redman, 'how long it will be before instructions come for the foreclosing of the mortgages and the sale of the property.'

'I am doubtful after all,' said the Vicar, who always doubted because he always saw both sides of the question, 'whether we have done rightly. We could have made a good fight, and we could have proved, at least, that Lord Fylingdale was in desperate straits for money.'

'Jack was right,' said Molly. 'Nothing can be done until we find the other woman.'

CHAPTER XL

ON MY RETURN

These things happened soon after my departure. When, six months later, I returned home I found that many things had followed.

First of all, the chief clerk, promoted to the management of the estate under orders from London, found himself in no enviable position. He was called upon to send up money week after week—my Lord wanted a hundred—five hundred—one knows not what, and must have it without delay. If there was no money, then all outstanding accounts must be collected, mortgages must be foreclosed; but where credit has been allowed it is not possible to collect accounts suddenly, nor can mortgages be foreclosed without due notice given. Then the houses must be sold; but in a place like Lynn, which has more houses than it can fill, it is not easy to sell a house, and the price which can be obtained is small indeed compared with the value of houses in London. Then farms and lands must be sold. But who was there to buy them?

Then came letters of rebuke, answered by letters of remonstrance. Money must be raised somehow; money had been advanced on the security of Molly's property; my Lord was in difficulties.

It is almost incredible that a man should be able in so short a time to waste and dissipate so large a sum of

money. When we returned, and I went ashore, the first person I saw was the unfortunate chief clerk, promoted to be manager.

'Mr. Pentecrosse,' he said, 'little did I think when I was put into this charge at a yearly salary of £300—more than I ever hoped or dreamed of getting—what a peck of trouble was waiting for me. Little did I understand, sir, how the great live; with what profusion, with what extravagance! As for that poor young lady—Heaven help her, for her property is vanishing fast! Soon there will be none. I have no right to talk of my employer's affairs; but you know what has happened.'

'In a word, Lord Fylingdale is getting through Molly's property?'

'Worse than that; he is throwing it away. Sir, I wake in the night with dreams of terror. I think I see a man plunging his hands into a sack of gold and throwing it about with both hands. I have been ordered to foreclose mortgages, to sell houses, to sell farms, to sell everything. When I cannot find a purchaser there come letters from my Lord's attorney, Bisse and Son—the young man was here himself with peremptory orders to find a purchaser—any purchaser. Money must be had.'

'Well, there will be, I suppose, an end some time or other.'

'The end will come before we look for it. Because, Mr. Pentecrosse, while the profusion goes on the estate grows less, and it becomes more difficult every day to answer their demands.'

'What is left?'

'I hear that Miss Molly's jewels were carried away by the young man. I hope he was honest, and kept none for himself. I know that the Captain had a large sum of money in his strong room waiting for a mortgage; that

went away with the young man. Since then I have sent up all the money as it came in. I have foreclosed the mortgages. Some of the mortgagors could not pay, and are now bankrupt. The Captain would never press his people so long as they paid the interest. I have been able to sell some of the farms; but you know this country, Mr. Pentecrosse; there is not much money among the gentry of these parts; they have been sold at a sacrifice; I have others in the market; there are houses also, but no one will buy them. Well, all will soon be gone. Then there will remain but one asset out of all the magnificent property of the work of three generations. Miss Molly's grandfather, and her father, and herself by means of the Captain—only one asset.'

'What is that?'

'And soon that will go, too,' he replied with a hollow groan. 'Sir, it is the noble fleet and the great business which belongs to the fleet. If the ships are sold——'

Suddenly I remembered my Lord's question on board the *Lady of Lynn*. 'Can,' he asked, 'a ship be sold like an estate of land?'

'They will be sold,' I said confidently. 'You may look to have them sold as soon as the other assets are expended. The last thing to be sold will be the fleet of ships, and the business which belongs to the ships.'

'And what will become of me?'

'Why,' I said, 'somebody must manage the business. Why not you, since you have been all your life in it, and know what it means and how it is conducted? But who will buy it?'

'Not all the merchants of Lynn together could find the money to buy these ships and carry on this business. No, sir, the whole must go to strangers.'

I left him, having given him the ship's papers, and went on to see the Captain and Molly.

'Jack,' she said ruefully, 'you promised when you went away that there would be a change. None has come, except a change for the worse. But that we expected.'

'In other words, Jack,' the Captain explained, 'everything that happens must happen before very long, or there will be nothing left. My Lord is spending at such a rate as no fortune could stand. What does he mean? When it is gone will he find another Molly and marry her for her money? There is not in all the land another Molly —not even for her good looks, let alone her fortune.'

As for good looks, her misfortunes had only improved poor Molly's face, which was now of a more pensive cast and had lost some of its youthful joyousness. To be sure she had little to make her joyous.

I observed, and I understood, that she was dressed with the utmost simplicity, like a farmer's daughter. For, outside, the people spoke of her as the Countess, even while they accepted her story and did not allow her to be married. She would, at least, present no external sign of rank which she denied.

'How does the man spend all this money?' I asked.

'Thank Heaven, Jack, a plain person, like you and me, cannot answer that question. How does he spend that money? Who knows? He has had, since he began, six months ago, a great many thousands. If he has sold the jewels he has had I know not how many more, and still the same cry—"Send more money—send more money; my Lord wants more money without delay." As for that poor man, lately my clerk, he is driven like a slave and bullied like a raw recruit. He wrings his hands. "What shall I do, Captain?" he asks. "What shall I do? Whither shall I turn?"'

Then there came into my head the thought that I might somehow, by going to London, find out what manner of life was led by my Lord, and in what ways he wasted and scattered Molly's substance. I could do nothing to stop or to hinder the waste; yet when one knows the truth it is generally more tolerable than the uncertainty—the truth is an open enemy which one can see and avoid, or submit to, or fight; the unknown is an unseen enemy who may attack from any quarter and by any weapon.

I thought over the plan for some days; it assumed clearer shape; it became a purpose. Molly, for her part, neither approved nor disapproved. She was for letting the man, who pretended to be her husband, work his wicked will and do what he pleased, provided that he left her in peace.

How was a simple sailor to find out the daily life of a great lord? The backstairs one would not choose; but what other way was there? I laid the matter before my father and the Vicar. 'I know not,' said the latter, 'that we can do much good by learning the truth, even if we ascertain all the particulars of the man's life from his very companions, but you might satisfy us on certain points. For instance, about that mysterious woman. I know not how you can find out anything, but you might possibly chance upon a clue.'

'Go,' said my father, 'to my cousin, the bookseller. He found out something about Lord Fylingdale's character. He might find out more. You can at least explain what you want and why.'

The end of it was that I went to London, riding with a small company, and meeting with no adventures on the way; that I put up at one of the inns outside Bishopsgate, and that I found out my cousin and put the whole

case before him. He was a grave and responsible citizen, a churchwarden, and of good standing in the Stationers' Company.

'You want to know how Lord Fylingdale spends his money. I suppose there are but two or three ways; of profligates, I take it, there are only a few varieties: one games; another rakes; a third surrounds himself with companions who flatter him and strip him. The first two are possessed of devils; the third is a fool. I do not imagine that my Lord Fylingdale is a fool, but you will probably find that he is possessed of both the other devils, and perhaps more.'

'But how am I to find out?'

'Why, cousin, I think I know a young fellow who can help you in this business.'

'Who is he? How can I approach him?'

'He is a gentleman who lives by his wits; not one of the ragged poets who haunt our shops with offers and projects and entreat work at a guinea a sheet. No; he is a gentleman, and a wit; his father was a General in the army; his cousin is a noble lord; he is received into the houses of the great when he chooses to go. He works for the theatre, and has composed several pieces said to be ingenious. As for his acquaintance with me, I would have you to understand that with two or three other booksellers we bring out a weekly essay like those of the *Spectator* and *Tatler*, which, of course, you know.'

'I never heard of them.'

The bookseller smiled with compassion. 'To be sure; at sea there are no books. Well, cousin, this young gentleman sometimes, when he is in the humour, will write me an essay in the true vein of an Addison. I will speak with him. If anyone can, he can do your business for you.'

It was by the kind offices of this gentleman, whom I found to be a person of quick wit and ready understanding, besides being of a most obliging disposition, that I was enabled to see, with my own eyes, an evening such as my lord loved. As for the details, you must, if you please, hold me excused. Let it suffice that our observations began at a gaming-house and ended at a tavern. At both places I kept in the background, because I would not be recognised by Lord Fylingdale.

He came into the gaming-house with the same lofty, cold carriage which he had shown at our humble Assembly. He advanced to the table; he began to play; no one could tell from his Lordship's face whether he lost or won; in half an hour or so my friend returned to my corner. 'He has lost a cool five hundred. They are whispering round the table that he loses hundreds every evening. All the world are asking what gold-mine he possesses that he can stand these losses.'

'I know his gold-mine,' I replied, with a sigh. 'But it is nearly exhausted.'

We stayed a little longer. It was about ten or eleven in the evening that his Lordship left the table.

'Come,' said my friend. 'I know the tavern where he will spend the next three or four hours. I can take you there. The bowls of punch and the company and everything are provided at his Lordship's expense. Mr. Pentecrosse, it must be not a gold-mine, but a mine of Golconda, to bear this profusion.'

'I tell you, sir, whatever it is, the mine is nearly run out.'

'It will not be bad for the morals of the town when it has quite run out.'

As regards the tavern and its company, it is, indeed, astonishing to me that any man should find pleasure in

such a company and in such discourse. At the head of the table sat my Lord. He appeared to be neither pleased nor displeased; the drink flowed like a stream of running water; it seized on all, and made their faces red, their voices thick; the noble leader sat unmoved, or, if moved at all, then by a kind of contempt. At two o'clock he rose and walked out into the street, where his chair awaited him.

'This is his humour,' said my guide. 'Play is his passion; it is the one thing that he lives for; he has wasted and ruined his own estate, which will be transmitted to his successor as bare as the back of my hand; and now he is wasting the wealth of Potosi and the diamonds of Golconda. He would waste the whole world if he could.'

'Why does he entertain such a crew?'

'It is his humour. He seems to delight in observing the wickedness of the world. He sits and looks on; he encourages and stimulates, and his face grows colder and his eyes harder. This man is not possessed of a devil. He is himself the Great Devil—the Prince of Iniquity.'

I had learned all that I wanted to know. It was now quite certain that we were within a short distance from the end. The lands and houses in the market would find a purchaser; the fleet and the business would then be sold. What next?

The day after this experience in the life of a rake I paid a visit for the first and only time to St. James's Park in the afternoon. It was, I remember, a cold but clear and bright day in January. At the gates stood a crowd of lackeys and fellows waiting for their ladies, and stamping on the ground to keep off the cold. Within, a goodly company walked briskly up and down. They were the great people of London whom I saw here. While I looked

on admiring the dresses of the ladies and the extravagances of the gentlemen, who seemed to vie with each other in calling attention to themselves by their gestures, there passed me, walking alone, a lady whom at first I did not recognise. She started, however, and smartly tapped my hand with her fan—she carried the fan, although it was winter, just as the beaux dangled their canes from their wrists.

'Why,' she cried, 'it is my sailor! It is surely Jack Pentecrosse!'

Then I recognised the Lady Anastasia.

'And what is Jack Pentecrosse doing in this wicked town? And how is Molly—the Countess? Come, Jack, to my house. It is not far from here. I should like a talk with you, and to hear the news. And I will give you a dish of tea. Why, I left Lynn in disgrace—did I not? On account of the Grand Jury of Middlesex. It was that evening when Lord Fylingdale turned upon his enemies.'

Her house was not very far from St. James's Street. As we walked along, she discoursed pleasantly in her soft and charming manner, as if she was made happy just by meeting me, and as if she had always been thinking about me.

She placed me in a chair before the fire; she sat opposite; she pulled her bell-rope and called for tea; then she began to talk about Lynn and its people.

'Tell me, Jack, about your friend Molly. Is she reconciled to her rank and title yet? I believe she does not live with her husband.'

'She denies that she was married.'

'Ah! I have heard, in fact, that there was some sort of a story—a cock and a bull story—about the wedding.'

'Another woman was substituted. Molly was at home.'

'Another woman? Strange! Why was she substituted? Who was she?'

'I know not. The matter is a mystery. Certain it is, however, that Lord Fylingdale was married. I myself saw the wedding. I was in the church.'

'You were in the church?' She raised her fan for a moment. 'You were in the church? And you saw the wedding? Who was the bride?'

'I do not know. At the time I thought it was Molly.'

'Jack,' she leaned over, looking me full in the face. 'Have you no suspicion?'

'None. I cannot understand how, all in a moment, and when he found that Molly was not there, the bridegroom found means to substitute another woman dressed as Molly should have been. I cannot understand it.'

'It is, as you say, strange. Do you think you will ever find out?'

'Why not? There are three persons in the plot—Lord Fylingdale, Mr. Purdon, and the woman. One of the two last will perhaps reveal the truth.'

She was silent for a moment.

'Well, and what are you doing in town?'

'I came to learn, if I could, something of Lord Fylingdale's private life.'

'Have you succeeded?'

'He is a gambler and a rake. He is rapidly wasting the whole of poor Molly's fortune. In a few months, or weeks, it will all be gone.'

'Yes,' she replied; 'all will be gone.'

'First he took the money and the jewels——'

'What?' she sat up suddenly. 'He took the jewels?'

'He took them first. Then he sold the lands.'

'Oh, tell me no more! He is wasting and destroying. It is his nature. First he took the jewels. How long ago?'

'Six months ago.'

'He has had the jewels,' she said. 'He has had them for six months.' Her face became hard and drawn as with pain; her smiling mouth became hard; the light died out of her eyes; she became suddenly twenty years older. I wondered what this change might mean. You will think that I was a very simple person not to guess more from all these indications. She pushed back her chair and sprang to her feet; she walked over to the window and looked out upon the cold street, in which there were flying flakes of snow. Then she came back and stood before the fire. 'You can go,' she said harshly, not looking me in the face. 'You can go,' she repeated, forgetting her proffered hospitality of tea. 'About that woman, Jack, you may find her yet. Many a wicked woman has been goaded by wrongs intolerable to confess her wickedness. I think you may find her. It will be too late to save Molly's fortune; but when it is all spent there will be a chance for you, Jack.' She turned upon me a wan and sad smile. 'Happy Molly!' she added, laying her hand upon my arm with the sweet graciousness that she could command. 'Jack,' she added, 'I think we may pity that poor wretch who personated Molly. It was perhaps out of love for a worthless man. Women are so. It is not worth, or virtue, or ability, or character that awakens love and keeps it alive. A woman, Jack, loves a man. There is nothing more to be said. If he is a good man so much the better. If not—still she loves him.' She sighed heavily. 'What do you sailors know about women? Virtue, fame, and fortune do not make love, nor, Jack—which is a hard thing for you to believe—does all the wickedness in the world destroy love. A woman may be goaded into revenge, but it makes her all the more unhappy—because love remains.'

I went away, musing on this woman who sometimes

seemed so true and earnest with all her fashion and affectations. For, as she spoke about love, the tears stood in her eyes as if she was speaking of her own case. But I never suspected her; I never had the least suspicion of her as the mysterious woman.

I took cars into the City and went to my cousin's shop, where there were half a dozen gentlemen talking volubly about new books, among them my friend who had taken me to the gaming-house and to the tavern. When he saw me he slipped aside. 'Mr. Pentecrosse,' he said, 'your cousin reminds me that I once told him what I could learn concerning an unfortunate poet named Semple. If you would like to see him I think I can take you to him.'

I thanked him, and said that I would willingly have speech of Mr. Semple.

So he led me down Little Britain, and so by a maze of streets to a place called Turnagain Lane. He stopped at an open door. The street in the waning light looked squalid, and the house mean.

'The darling of Parnassus,' he said, 'lies in the top chamber. You will find him there, unless I mistake not, because he cannot conveniently go abroad.'

So saying, he left me, and I climbed up the dark and dirty staircase, some of the steps of which had been taken away for firewood, and presently found myself at the top of the last flight before a closed door. I knocked. A faint voice bade me come in.

There was no fire in the fireplace; there was no candle; by the faint light which struggled through the window I perceived that I was in a garret; that all the furniture visible was a bed, and a man in the bed, a table and a chair. On the mantelshelf stood a candlestick without a candle and a tinder box.

'Who is it?' asked the man in bed.

'I am in search of Sam Semple. Are you Sam Semple?'

'I know that voice.' The man sat up. 'Is it the voice of Jack Pentecrosse?'

'The same. What cheer, man?'

For all answer he burst out crying like a child.

'Oh! Jack,' he said, 'I am starving. I made up my mind to starve. I have no longer any clothes. I have not even a candle. I have no money. I have not even a sheet of paper to write a letter, and I deserve it all—yes, I deserve it all.'

'Why, this is bad. But let me first get you some food. Then we will talk.'

I went downstairs and found a woman, who told me of a shop where I could get some necessaries, and I presently returned bearing food and a bottle of wine, some coals and candles, and a warm coat, which I thought would be useful.

By the light of the candle and the fire I could perceive that the condition of the unhappy poet was miserable indeed. Never was there a more wretched den of a garret. The plaster had fallen from the walls; the window was mostly stuffed with rags in place of glass; in a word, everything betokened the greatest extremity of poverty. As for the man himself, he had neither coat, waistcoat, nor shoes. He sat on the bed half dressed, but the rest of his wardrobe had been pawned or sold. There were no books; there were no papers; there was nothing to show his calling; and there was no sign of food.

At the sight of my basket and its contents the man fell to. With just such a rage have I seen a sailor picked up at sea from an open boat fall upon food and devour it. Nor did Sam finish till he had devoured the whole of the cold beef and bread—a goodly ration—and swallowed the whole of the bottle of wine, a generous allowance. Then

he breathed a sigh of satisfaction, and put on the thick coat which I had bought for him.

'Well,' I said, 'can we now talk?'

'Jack, you have saved my life; but I shall be hungry again to-morrow. Lend me a little money.'

'I will lend you a guinea or two. But tell me first how came you here? I thought you were in the confidence of a certain noble lord.'

'He is a villain, Jack. He is the greatest villain unhung. Oh! hanging is too good for him. After all I did for him! The lying villain!'

'What you did for him, Sam, was to give him the chance of ruining an innocent and helpless girl.'

'I gave him the heiress. Was it nothing to promote the daughter of a plain merchant and make her a Countess?'

'Tell me more. What were you to get for it?'

'It was I who invented an excuse for taking my Lord and his friends to Lynn.'

'Yes, I understand. You invented the Spa. The water in the well——'

'The water is very good water. It could do no harm. I wrote to the Doctor—I invented the analysis, applying it from another. I told him about the discovery and the things said by the newspapers. There was no discovery; nobody had heard of the water; no physician sent any of his patients there; the only visitors from London were my Lord and his friends.'

'They were all his friends, then?'

'All. His Reverence is in the pay of Beelzebub, I believe. The Colonel is a bully and a gamester—Sir Harry is a well-known decoy—Lady Anastasia shares her bank with Lord Fylingdale. They were a nest of sharpers and villains, and their business and mine was to spread abroad reports of the shining virtue of his Lordship.'

'All this, or part of it, we found out or guessed. The Vicar publicly denounced you all at the Assembly. But what were you to get by it for yourself?'

'I was to have an appointment under Government of £200 a year at least.'

'Well?'

'I was to have it directly after the marriage. That was the promise. I have it in writing.'

'And you have not got it?'

'No; and I shall not get it. When I claimed it his Lordship asked me to read the promise. I showed it him. I had kept it carefully in my pocket-book. "On the marriage of Lord Fylingdale with Miss Molly." What do you think he said? Oh, villain! villain!'

'What did he say?'

'He said, "Hold there, my friend! On the marriage. Very well, although I say that I am married to that lady, very oddly the lady swears that she is not married to me. Now, when that lady acknowledges the marriage I will fulfil my promise. That is fair, is it not?" Then I lost my head and forgot his rank and my position, and the next moment I was kicked into the street by his lackeys without salary, without anything. Oh, villain! villain!'

It seemed as if there was here some opening—of what nature I knew not. However, I spoke seriously to Sam. I pointed out that in introducing a broken gamester—a profligate—a man of no honour or principle, the companion of profligates and gamesters, to the simple folk of Lynn who were ready to believe anything, he had himself been guilty of an act more villainous even than the breaking of this contract. I gave him, however, a guinea for present necessities, and I promised him five guineas more if he would write a history of the whole business so far as he was concerned. And I undertook to leave this money

with my cousin the bookseller—to be paid over to him on receiving the MS.

This business arranged, I had nothing more to do with London. I had been, however, as you shall presently learn, more successful than I myself understood, for I had learned by actual presence the daily life and conversation of this noble Lord, and I had laid the foundation for a proof of the conspiracy to disguise his true character. And, what was much more important, I had unwittingly fired the mind of the mysterious woman herself with resentment and jealousy.

CHAPTER XLI

THE FIRST AND THE SECOND CONFEDERATE

We were now, indeed, although we knew it not, very near the end of these troubles.

I returned with the satisfaction of bringing with me the confession of the conspiracy which we had long known. Still, it is one thing to know of a conspiracy, and quite another thing to have a plain confession by one of the chief conspirators. You may imagine that the poet was not long in writing out a full and complete confession, and in claiming the five guineas of my cousin, who took the liberty of reading the document, and of witnessing his signature before he gave up the money.

'Take it, sir,' he said; 'if to be a villain is to earn a reward of five guineas you have earned that reward. Take it, Judas Iscariot. Take it, and make a poem on the Wages of Sin if you can.'

'You trample on the weak. I am a worm who cannot turn. Still, sir, if you can find honest employment for a pen which adorns all it touches——'

'Go, sir. For such as you I have no employment. My poets and authors may be poor, but they are honest. Get thee out of my sight.'

I showed the document first to my father and the Vicar.

'So far, well,' said the latter. 'If proof were needed

of a most wicked conspiracy here it is. But in the main thing we are no more forward than before, Jack. We are not helped by this writing to the mystery of the strange woman and her intervention. A strange woman indeed she must be—one such as described by the wise king.'

'We shall find her yet. What hold can this spendthrift gamester have upon the woman—his partner in the crime? Some time or other she will be tempted to reveal the truth.'

'We know not. Women are not as men. They love the most worthless as well as the most noble.' Lady Anastasia had said the same thing.

'Love is like the sunshine, my son. It falls upon good and evil alike, and, like the sunshine, it may be wasted, or it may be turned to help. We must not expect to find this woman; we must not count upon her revenge or her repentance.'

'We shall find her, sir, I am certain that we shall find her. The spendthrift wastes and scatters with a kind of madness. He will soon finish all, and will have nothing left for his confederates. You see what one confederate has confessed, having been betrayed by his master.'

Said the Vicar: 'The sweet singer of Israel ceases not to proclaim the lesson that all the generations must learn and lay to heart—"I have seen," he says, "the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a green bay-tree. Yet he passed away, and, lo! he was not. Yea, I sought him, and he could not be found." Patience, therefore, let us have patience.'

He fell into a meditation in which I disturbed him not. After a while he returned to the business of Sam's written confession, which he held in his hands.

'It is remarkable,' he said, 'how this young man, who from his boyhood was a self-deceiver, imagining himself to

be somebody, endeavours to place his conduct in a light flattering to his self-deception. It is evident, abundantly, that he has been guided throughout by two motives, the one as base as the other. The first is revenge for the wholesome cudgelling which the Captain bestowed upon him. It was administered, I doubt not, with judicial liberality—even erring on the side of liberality—and he left in the man's mind that longing for revenge which belongs to the weaker and the baser sort. See, he writes, "Since Captain Crowle was resolved to marry his ward above her station, I was quite sure that he would be grateful to me for the signal service which he could in no way effect by his own efforts of raising her from her humble condition to the rank of Countess." He thus betrays himself. And as to the second motive, he says, "A poor man has the right to better himself if he can. It is his duty. I saw a way, an unexpected and an honourable way." Listen to the creature. "I made the discovery that my patron, by gambling and raking, had become, as regards his affairs, nothing less than what in a merchant would be called a bankrupt. That is to say, he had spent all he had, sold all he could, raised all the money possible on his entailed estates, and but for his privilege as a peer would now be in a debtor's prison. Yet he contrived to keep his head above water—I found out how, as well—and still maintained a brave show, though, by reason of his bad character, he was not countenanced except by profligates like himself. I therefore laid open to him a way of restoring his affairs. I offered to introduce him to a great heiress. At first he did not believe that there was in any country town an heiress with the fortune that I described to him. But I gave him some proofs and I promised him more. Whereupon I made known my condition. As soon as he was

married to this heiress he was to procure for me, by purchase or by influence, a post under Government worth at least £200 a year, with perquisites, or perhaps a benefice, if I could procure ordination, of which I had no doubt in thinking of my learning and my character for piety."'

'Ho!' said my father, 'his learning and his piety!'

'"My patron is now master of that fortune and is wasting it as fast as he can in the old courses. He refuses to keep his promise. Nay, he hath sold the last preferment in his gift to the highest bidder. It was a rectory of £350 a year."'

'This fellow,' said the Vicar, 'knows that his patron is at his last guinea. He knows him to be a loose liver and a gamester, and he has not hesitated in conspiring to place this innocent girl, by means of her simple guardian, in the hands of such a man. Yet he whines and thinks himself ill-used, and a football of fate. Formerly, he thought himself the favourite of the muses. The man is a cur, Jack; he has the cunning and the cowardice and the treachery of a mongrel cur. Take back his confession. It may, however, be useful.'

'What about the discovery concerning the Spa?'

'Why, Jack, it seems as if he drew his bow and shot an arrow at a venture, yet hit the bull's eye. The Doctor has a book, in which he inscribes cases of cures effected by the waters of the Spa. The book is well-nigh filled. It is true that this Prince of Liars invented and pretended the discovery of a Spa; it is also true, as we cannot but believe, that the waters have actually done all that he pretended. He, therefore, unconsciously, seems to have proclaimed the truth. Let the thing remain as it is, then. Time will show. The next season's cases and cures will perhaps establish the reputation of the Spa on a more solid basis even than at present.'

Time, as I have already told you, did show, for no one came at all. The Spa was neglected in its second season; in the third it was forgotten; even the Pump Room was removed, and only the well remained. But the Doctor, who was bitterly disappointed with the failure, was never informed concerning the true history of the Grand Discovery.

It was the perfidy of the Chief Conspirator to every one who assisted him which brought about the full exposure of the truth. I have been careful to let you know at every step the whole truth as we discovered it afterwards. You have understood the conspiracy from the outset, and the villainy of all concerned. The woman in the pink silk cloak has been no mystery to you. Perhaps you admire our simplicity in not guessing the truth. Reader, you are young, perhaps; or you have been young. In either case, I am sure that you have experienced the ease with which a woman, lovely, sympathetic, winning, will with the combined aid of her beauty, her voice, her witchcraft, so surround herself with an imaginary air of truth, sincerity and purity, as to exclude all possibility of treachery and falsehood. Lady Anastasia had allowed me to discover, whether by inadvertence or not, that she was jealous; but what did I know of feminine jealousy and its powers? I might have known, perhaps, that jealousy implies love, or, at least, the claim to exclusive possession; but what did I know of the strength and passion of woman's love? I was young; I was inexperienced; I was a sailor, ignorant of many common wiles; I was easily moved by a woman, and I had that universal respect for rank which makes us slow to believe that a lady of quality can be treated as if it were possible to suspect her. By the same rule I should, you will say, be equally unable to regard Lord Fylingdale with suspicion. But we are not always consistent with

ourselves. Besides, his Lordship was a man and not a woman. Rank or no rank, we know that a man is always a man. And, in addition, he stood between Molly and me.

I have said that we were near the end of our troubles. One after the other the victims of Lord Fylingdale's perfidy and of their own wickedness came over, so to speak, to the other side, impelled by rage and the desire for revenge, and made confession. There were five—I take them in order. The first was our old friend Sam, whose confession you have heard; the second was Colonel Lanyon. Like the poet, he also fell upon evil days; but, less lucky than Sam, he lost his liberty, and became a prisoner for debt in the King's Bench Prison. When such an one is arrested and thrown into prison he is in grievous, if not in hopeless case; for, supposing his brothers or cousins to be in a responsible position, they are ashamed of one who has led the life of a gamester and a bully and a decoy. They will not help him to begin again his old life, and if they are like himself, they want all they have for their own pleasures —rakes being the most selfish of all men—and so they will not help him. He wrote, therefore, from his prison, addressing himself to Captain Crowle as the guardian of the lady for whose capture their snares were set.

'Sir,' he said, 'I am a prisoner for debt, lying in the King's Bench, and likely to remain a prisoner for the rest of my life. I have cousins who are prosperous. They refuse to assist me. Yet my detaining creditors are few and the whole amount is ridiculously small, considering my position and my reputation. That my own cousins should refuse to release me is, I own, a matter which surprises me, for I have conferred lustre upon a name hitherto obscure by my gallantry, my bravery, and my many adventures. It is a heartless world. There are many honest gentlemen

in this place, besides myself, who have found the world heartless and ungrateful.'

'Humph!' said the Vicar, in whose presence the Captain began to make out this surprising letter.

'My misfortunes are due to no less a person than my Lord Fylingdale, a man whose treachery and ingratitude are not equalled, as far as I know, by the history of any villain that was ever hanged.'

'Why,' the Captain interrupted, 'here's a fellow catched in his own toils. Do you read it, Jack; your eyes are better than mine.'

So I took it. 'When I consider not only his conduct towards myself, but his systematic deception towards you, sir, I am moved by indignation to write to you and to expose a plot in which I had a hand, but in ignorance. Sir, I would have you know that for many years I have been in the employ of his Lordship. It is not an uncommon thing, when an officer is broken and cannot find employment for his sword, to enter the service of some patron, whom he must oblige by all means in his power. In return, he is safe from arrest, and must take what wages are given him. My own services were those of a decoy to a gaming-table, in which his Lordship held a secret interest, and of a duellist when my sword would be of use. In the former capacity I served his Lordship for four years faithfully, bringing young gamesters to the table, luring them on, playing high for their example, and winning pretended sums for their encouragement. This kind of service is perfectly well known and understood, so that those who knew that Lord Fylingdale was my patron, knew also that he had an interest in the bank. On three or four occasions, when my Lord's honour was attacked, or his conduct resented, I went out for him, and in all such cases rendered it impossible for his adversary to continue the quarrel.'

'So,' said the Vicar, 'the fellow confesses that he is a murderer, does he?'

'In the pursuit of his Lordship's service I have cheerfully incurred odium that was rightly his. But this kind of odium ends, as I found, by blasting the reputation for honour, even of a most honourable man, such as myself.'

'Ha!' cried the Vicar.

'This odium now follows me everywhere—from Bath to Tunbridge, and from Tunbridge to London, so that there are not many gaming-houses into which I am now suffered to enter, and my company has of late declined to the level of the 'prentice and the shopkeeper. I have also been driven off the Heath at Newmarket, charged with corrupting the trainers; and even at the cockpit I have incurred suspicion as to doctoring the birds. All—all was in the service of my patron.'

'Villain! Villain!' said the Vicar.

'In May last I was ordered by my Lord to proceed to Lynn Regis, a town of which I had no knowledge. There was to be a gaming-table, in which, as usual, he was interested. My duty was again to act as decoy. I was also, at the same time, to lose no opportunity of representing his Lordship as a miracle of virtue. The reason of these orders I did not ask. I obeyed, however, although it certainly seemed to me that any praise of virtue on the part of a gamester like myself would be received with suspicion.

'As regards the performance of my duties at Lynn I say nothing. The play was miserably low, in spite of my own example and encouragement. The company considered a guinea a monstrous sum to lose. The bank made nothing to speak of. As regards my own private concerns, there was but one man with whom I transacted business worth naming. This, however, was highly satisfactory, for, from

this one person, without raising the least suspicion, I won as much as £1,200, which was to be raised upon his estate in the county. Three-fourths of this would go to my Lord. I had not made so successful a haul for many years.

'Now, one morning, after a debauch, much heavy drinking and more losses, this gentleman, Tom Rising by name, came to me, and confided to me, under the oath of secrecy, his intention of carrying off that very night the heiress of Lynn, as she was called. If he succeeded, he would pay the whole of his losses the very next day. If not, he must wait until the money could be raised. In order to effect this object he would have to go to Norwich; the business would take time. But he was sure of success. He could not fail. He further described to me the plan he had formed, and the place whither he would carry the girl.

'By this time I had formed a pretty good guess of my patron's intention in coming to Lynn. Accordingly I laid the matter before him.'

'After an oath of secrecy,' said the Vicar.

'He considered a great while, then he said, "Colonel, this affair may turn out the most lucky thing that could possibly happen. Be in the Card Room in readiness. We will let the fellow go off with the girl, then I shall follow and secure her. Do you understand?"

'I understood that he desired the good grace of the lady, and that such a rescue could not fail to procure her favour unless he had already obtained it. "But," I said, "this man is a bull for strength. He will fight for the girl, and he will be like a mad bull. It is dangerous."

'"I will myself," he replied, "undertake to tame this bull. Man, do you suppose that a master of fence can fear the result of an encounter with a fellow always half drunk, and on this occasion, which makes the thing more easy, more than half mad with rage and disappointment."

'Sir, you know the rest. The abduction of the lady was known beforehand by my Lord and myself. He might have stopped it, but that he wanted the honour and the glory of the rescue.'

'There is no end or limit to the villainy of the pair,' said the Vicar.

'The next day, Tom Rising having a sword wound in the right shoulder, I waited upon his lordship. I pointed out that the serious wound inflicted on Mr. Rising had brought his life in danger; that even if he recovered, his old friends, who were very angry with him for the attempted abduction, would have no more to do with him; that, from all I had heard, he would with difficulty raise so much money as he owed me upon an estate already dipped; that he had other creditors; and that one result of the business was that we had possibly lost £1,200 or a good part of it, of which one-fourth, or £300, would have been my share, and I asked my Lord point-blank if he thought I could afford to lose £300.

'My Lord laughed pleasantly. "Shall a trifle of £300 part two old friends, Colonel? Not so, not so. When I marry this heiress, not £300, but a thousand shall be yours. Remember; write it down. It is a promise. After my marriage I will give you a clear thousand to repay your losses and expenses."

'This was a promise on which I relied, and you may imagine my satisfaction when I heard that my Lord had been married privately at six in the morning. I waited on him at once for the money. "Patience, man," he said, "I must first touch it myself. I cannot get at the money without certain forms. There shall be no needless delay." So I refrained.

'I had been put to heavy expense by going to Lynn and living there. I had to keep up the outward appearance

of substance; I threw money about, I ordered bowls of punch, I lost over a hundred pounds in establishing my credit on a firm basis; I won nothing to speak of, except from Tom Rising. In the end I was publicly insulted and exposed by a vulgar beast called Gizzard, after his low trade. This was in presence of Tom Rising himself, who thereupon swore that he would pay me nothing. The world is full of men always ready to repudiate their debts of honour.'

'It is indeed,' said the Vicar, 'and of men who do not act in accordance with the laws of honour.'

'Sir, you will hardly believe me. My Lord now refuses to pay even my expenses. He owes me a thousand pounds promised as my share in the business. I have spent one hundred pounds in establishing my credit and another hundred for my personal expenses—in all £1,200.

'Now, sir, I have a proposition to make. I know the dispute about the alleged marriage. I believe there was a personation and that I know the woman who personated your deeply-injured ward in the church. Pay me £1,200 and I will name her.'

'Softly,' said the Vicar. 'To name the lady is not to prove the personation.'

'You cannot hesitate,' the letter went on. 'Already I am sure my Lord has wasted ten times that sum. I hear from all sides that he is like one who squanders an inexhaustible treasure. Send me this money and I will put you in the way of exposing him to the world as a conspirator and of putting a stop to further robbery. You shall at least be enabled to save what is left.

'As you may require a few days to deliberate over this proposal, I beg you to let me have by the first opportunity a few guineas in advance. Otherwise I shall have to part with my clothes. In my line of life a good appearance is

essential. Should I be driven to that necessity I shall indeed be ruined for life, because I shall have to go over to the common side, where my accomplishments and skill will be of no use whatever to me.'

'He means that you cannot get any profit by cheating at play those who have nothing. Is that all, Jack?'

'That is all.' I folded the letter and gave it to the Captain.

'To name the lady, I say,' the Vicar repeated, 'is not to prove the crime. It might, however, suggest an explanation to the mystery. The letter proves that there is an explanation. Still, Captain, my opinion is that the writer of this letter should receive no answer. There is no hardship before him which he has not deserved. Let him lie in his prison and repent. "Let the wicked be ashamed, and let them be silent in the grave. Let the lying lips be put to silence." Captain, let us have no traffic with this ungodly man. Let him henceforth be silent in his grave.'

CHAPTER XLII

THE THIRD AND THE FOURTH CONFEDERATE

The voice of the third confederate followed. It was a voice from the tomb. Sir Harry Malyns, the poor old butterfly who had lived for nigh upon eighty years in the world of fashion; who had spent his patrimony, and had, in the end, been reduced to the miserable work of a decoy, as you have heard, was at last summoned to render an account of his life. What an account to render! So many thousand nights at the gaming table; so many thousand at suppers and after; so many debauches; so many days of idle talk; the whole of his long life devoted to the pursuit of pleasure, or what the people of fashion call pleasure. However, the old man was at last seized with a mortal illness; at the approach of death some of the scales fell from his eyes; his former ideas of honour came back to him. He repented of his degradation as the secret servant of Lord Fylingdale; he repented of his share in the deception which led to the promise, if not the performance, of marriage between his patron and Miss Molly.

And he dictated to someone, who attended him in his last moments, a brief note which was accepted in the spirit of forgiveness, which he desired.

The communication was addressed to Captain Crowle. 'The following words,' it was written, 'were in substance dictated by the late Sir Harry Malyns in his last illness,

namely, the day before he became unconscious, in which condition he lingered for forty-eight hours, when he breathed his last.'

There was neither signature, nor was the place of the deceased gentleman's last illness indicated. The following were the words dictated :

'I, Sir Harry Malyns, Baronet, being now, I believe, at the point of death, am greatly troubled in my conscience over the part I played in the deception of Captain Crowle, of King's Lynn ; his ward, Miss Molly ; and the people of the place, as to the character and principles of the Earl of Fylingdale. I very soon discovered his design in going to the town, and his hopes of securing the fortune of the lady called the Heiress of Lynn. My own part, to deceive her friends in the way indicated, I performed with zeal, being but the creature and servant of his Lordship, with no hope of help from any other quarter, should I lose his patronage. It was a most dishonourable part to play, unworthy of my name and of my family. I desire to convey to the young lady my humble request for her forgiveness, and my hope that a way may be found for her out of the toils spread for her by myself and others, his creatures and servants.

'There is, I learn, a denial on the lady's part as to her marriage at all. Of this I know nothing. But I am assured in my own mind that if this denial involves any act of treachery, perfidy, fraud, or conspiracy on the part of his Lordship, on that account alone, and without considering the many virtues, the candour, truth, and innocence of the lady, I should accept her denial. But in this crowning act of treachery, I rejoice that I have had neither part nor lot.'

There was no signature, but there seemed no reason to

entertain a doubt as to the genuine character of the communication. The old man on his deathbed returned to a late recognition of the laws of honour and a late repentance.

'He was a poor creature,' said the Vicar. 'He was entirely made up of stays and wig and powder. He ought to have been taken about the country in order to show the world the true meaning of a fribble and a beau. It is, however, something to his credit that in the end he remembered the old tradition, and saw himself as he was. Pray Heaven that his repentance was thorough!'

'Let us at least forgive him,' said Molly. 'He seemed a harmless old gentleman. One would never have thought him capable of acting so dishonourable a part. But he repented. We must forgive him.'

'Meantime, we are no nearer the mysterious woman who personated you, Molly; nor do we understand why she did it; nor do we understand how it was done.'

A week later came another letter. This time it was from the Rev. Benjamin Purdon, A.M. It was a truly impudent letter, worthy of the man and his character.

'To Captain Crowle.

'Sir,—I have hesitated for some time whether to address you on the subject of your ward's pretended marriage with my late patron, Lord Fylingdale. I say "pretended" because I am in a position to expose the whole deception. I can place you in possession of the whole of the facts. They are simple; they cannot be denied or disproved. Your ward was not in the church at all; she was not married; her place was taken by a woman who personated her, appearing in your ward's dress, namely, a pink silk cloak, the hood thrown over her head. I, who performed the ceremony, was deceived. That is to say, I was told the name of the bride and there was nothing to

awaken any suspicions. At this point, and as a proof that part of this story is true, I would ask your ward to write her name in full, and I would then ask you to compare that writing with the signature in the registers.'

'Are we stupid?' cried the Vicar. 'Have we been struck with judicial stupidity? Let us instantly, without any delay, proceed to this test. Molly, my dear, get paper, pen, and ink. . . . So—now sit at the table. Write your name as you usually write it when you sign a letter.'

'But I never write any letters,' said Molly.

'She writes the names on the pots of pickles and preserved fruit,' said the Captain. 'Come, Molly, you can sign your name.'

The girl blushed and seized the pen. It was not with the pen of a ready writer that she wrote, in a clumsy hand—a hand unaccustomed to such writing—her name, 'Molly Miller.'

'Is this your best writing, Molly?'

'Indeed, sir, I am ashamed that it is no better. At school I learned better, but I have so little occasion to write.'

'So long as it is the signature you would use in the church it will serve,' said the Vicar. 'Come, let us to St. Nicholas' at once, and send for the clerk. We will examine these registers, and we will read the rest of the letter afterwards.'

The chest was unlocked; the registers were taken out; the books were opened at the right page. The Vicar laid Molly's writing beside that of the register.

'You see,' said the Vicar, 'the very signature proclaims the cheat. We have been, of a verity, seized with judicial blindness for our sins.'

The differences were not such as could be explained away, for the signature in the book was round and full and flowing—a bold signature for a woman—every letter well formed and of equal size, and in a straight line; the work of one who wrote many letters, and prided herself, apparently, on the clearness and beauty of her hand. Molly's, on the other hand, showed letters awkwardly formed, not in line, of unequal height, and the evident work of one unaccustomed to writing.

'What doubt have we now?' asked the Vicar. 'My friends, I see daylight. But let us return to complete my reverend brother's letter.'

The letter thus continued:

'You have now, I take it, satisfied yourself that your ward could not possibly have penned that signature. You have no doubt, if you had any before, that your ward's denial was the truth.

'At the same time you do not appear to have considered the matter worth fighting. It was not, for assuredly a court of justice, even with the handwriting as evidence, would have decided against you. So far, you were well advised.

'You, therefore, withdrew opposition, and suffered the husband to take over, what he claimed, control of the estate.

'From what I am informed, he is pursuing a course of mad riot, in which he alone sits cold and composed, as is his wont, for the contemplation of wickedness in action is more to his taste than becoming an actor himself; he is also playing and losing heavily. Therefore, I have every reason to believe that he will before long get through the estate of his so-called wife. I hope he will, because he will then have nothing left at all, and the last state of that man will be as miserable as he deserves.'

'This man, too, has his revenge in sight,' said the Vicar.

'I come now to the main point. I do not suppose that more than the third, or so, of your ward's fortune has yet been wasted. I will enable you to save the rest.

'For a certain consideration, I need not write down its nature, my noble patron promised to pay me £12,000 on his marriage with this heiress. It is a large sum of money, but the service I rendered was worth more.'

'It was his own confederacy, I suppose.'

'For the honour of the British aristocracy I regret to inform you that Lord Fylingdale repudiates the contract. He says that I may take any steps I please, but he refuses to pay. That the consideration—but I need not go on; in a word, he will give me nothing.

'Under these circumstances I will expose the whole affair, and put an end, at least, to his further depredations. If, therefore, you take over this obligation upon yourself I am prepared to draw up an account of the whole business—the personation of your ward, the reasons and the manner of it, and an explanation of the very remarkable coincidence—so remarkable as to seem impossible—of the substitution of one woman for another at a moment's notice. I further promise that this information will at once turn the tables; that you can refuse to let his Lordship interfere further with your ward's estate; and that you can take steps to declare the so-called marriage null and void. Nothing shall be left for explanation; all shall be quite simple and straightforward; and I can put evidence in your hands which you little suspect.

'Further, I promise and engage to ask for nothing until I have proved all that has to be proved and have established the fact that your ward was not married by me.

'You can send me twenty-five guineas in advance. It

can go to London to the coach office of the Swan with Four Necks, where I will call for it.

'I am, naturally, after so great a disappointment, much in want of money, therefore I shall be obliged if you will make the advance fifty instead of twenty-five guineas.

'(Signed) BENJAMIN PURDON,
'Clerk in Holy Orders.'

We looked at each other in silence.

'To procure thy freedom, Molly,' said the Vicar, taking her hand, 'there is nothing which we would not do—that honest men dare to do. But let us not be drawn away from our duty. We will have no part nor lot nor any traffic with rogues. This man is an arch-rogue. This letter is the letter of a villain, who is, one would say—the Lord forgive me for saying so of a fellow-sinner!—beyond the power of repentance and beyond the hope of forgiveness. Patience, Molly, I think that we shall soon be rewarded—even with the loss of all thy worldly goods.'

CHAPTER XLIII

THE FIFTH AND LAST CONFEDERATE

And then came the final revelation—the confession of the fifth and last confederate—which cleared up the whole mystery and explained that which, with one consent, we had all declared to be wholly unintelligible.

The counsel learned in the law gave his written opinion that, considering that the marriage ceremony was fixed for 6 a.m.; that the bridegroom had no knowledge of the bride's intention not to present herself; that he left his lodgings a few minutes before six; that a few minutes after six, one Pentecrosse, well known to the lady, witnessed the marriage ceremony and believed the bride to be the lady in question, dressed as she was accustomed to dress, although he did not see her face; that the parish clerk also recognised the lady; that the clergyman was ready to swear that the bride was the lady; and that the registers showed her signature—there could be no chance whatever of success in disputing or denying the marriage.

The Vicar, perceiving the weight of evidence, and adding to it the apparent impossibility of procuring at a moment's notice the personation of the bride, reluctantly advised submission, while being firmly persuaded that Molly and her mother had spoken the truth, and that there was devilry somewhere.

We submitted, with what results you have seen.

It is, I believe, a rule with some play-writers, where they have a plot with a mystery or a secret in it, to keep the audience in ignorance, and so to heighten their interest, until the revelation in the last act clears up the mystery and relieves the spectators of their suspense. Others, again, allow the audience to understand at the outset that their heroine or hero is the victim of villainy, but do not explain the full nature of that villainy until the end, when the plots of the wicked are brought to light.

I have told this tale without the art of the playwright. I have shown you exactly how things happened, though we only discovered the truth long afterwards. For instance, you know already what was the full explanation of the marriage which I witnessed; you know the surprise with which the bridegroom discovered the truth, and you know besides the impudent use which, by the advice of the Reverend Benjamin Purdon, was made of that discovery. Also you know the reason of the personation and the person by whose indiscreet chattering it became possible.

I have now to tell you how we ourselves discovered the truth.

After the arrival of the letters already described, nothing new was learned for some months. That is to say, Colonel Lanyon wrote no more; the Reverend Mr. Purdon, though he continued to write letters which threatened concealment and offered exposure, alternately; though his demand for money dropped with every letter until he had become a mere beggar, offering to reveal the whole in return for the relief of his present necessities; gave no hint of the nature of the exposure he desired to sell. But he had received, so far, no reply to any of his letters.

Between January and June my ship made another

voyage to Lisbon and back. When I landed, what I had to learn was the continual solicitation of Mr. Purdon, and the continual waste of the fortune. The demand for money never ceased. 'Send up more money—more money —more money. His Lordship is in urgent want of more money.'

By this time a whole year had passed since the pretended marriage and our submission. Never was a magnificent property so destroyed and diminished in so short a time. Farms, lands, houses were sold for what they would fetch—at half their value—a quarter of their value. All the money out at mortgage had been called in—all the money received at the quay and the counting-house had been sent to his Lordship's attorneys. In one short twelvemonth the destruction had been such that in June there was actually nothing left—nothing out of that princely fortune, except the fleet of ships and the general business. 'And now, Mr. Pentecrosse,' said the manager (lately clerk and accountant), 'the end draweth nigh. A few more weeks or months and this great shipping firm, near a hundred years old, which hath sent its ships all about the world; the most important house outside London and Bristol, will put up its shutters and close its door. Alas! The pity of it! The pity of it!'

'But,' I said, 'this spendthrift Lord, this waster and devourer, surely will not destroy the very spring and fountain of this wealth!'

'I know not. He seems possessed with a devil.' Here the manager was wrong, because he was possessed of seven devils. 'His waste is nothing short of madness. It seems as if he was unable to look before him, even in such a simple matter as the origin of the money, which he has obtained by marriage—if he is married—and is now wasting as fast as he can.'

It is in no way profitable, unless one is a divine, to search into the heart of the wicked man. The psalmist, who was continually troubled by considering the ways of the ungodly, supplies us with sufficient guidance as to his mind and his thoughts. In the case of Lord Fylingdale, I would compare him with the highwaymen and common thieves in one particular, namely, that they seem to have no power of thrift or of prudence, but must continually waste and devour what they acquire without honest labour. It is as if they understood that, their way of life being uncertain, and the end at any time possible, their only chance of enjoyment is the present moment. Now, Lord Fylingdale was using the proceeds of an enormous robbery obtained by a fraud of incredible audacity. I think he felt the uncertainty of his hold. It depended on the silence of two persons. Should these two persons unite in revealing the conspiracy he would at least be able to rob no longer. Now, he had already alienated both of them. The one he had filled with the passion for revenge; the other . . . but you shall hear. I think, moreover, that he found a gambler's joy in the handling of large sums and playing with them; that he kept no account of the money he lost; and that, with his companions, he kept a kind of open house at certain taverns for the debauches over which he presided, without condescending in person to join the drunken orgy. Did he find a strange enjoyment in the debauchery of others? Men have been known—I cannot understand it—to delight in torturing other men and in witnessing their agonies; men might also—I know not how—take a delight in witnessing orgies and in listening to the discourses of drunken rakes. But it is not profitable, as I said, to dwell upon the mind of such a man.

It was on the 15th of June—I remember the date well—and shall always remember it. The *Lady of Lynn* had

arrived two days before, and we were moored off the quay. At ten o'clock, or thereabouts, one of the stable-boys from the house came aboard bringing a message for me. A lady, lodging at the 'Crown,' desired to see me immediately. The lady had arrived in the evening in a postchaise, having with her a maid. She had given no name, but in the morning had asked if my ship was in port, and on learning that it was she desired that a boy from the stables might carry this message to me.

I landed at our own quay—I say our own, but it was no longer ours, that is, Molly's quay. At the door of the counting-house stood the manager in conversation with the captain of one of our ships. He beckoned me to speak with him. When he had finished his discourse with the captain he turned to me.

'Mr. Pentecrosse,' he said, 'the worst has now begun. Tell Captain Crowle—I should choke if I had to tell him. Alas! poor man! It seems as if the work of his life was ruined and destroyed.' So saying, he handed me a letter to read. It was from my Lord's attorneys, Messrs. Bisse and Son. 'I suppose,' said the manager, 'that they are really acting for his Lordship. Their power of attorney cannot be denied, can it? Mr. Redman says that there is nothing for it but obedience.'

The letter was short:

'We have noted your information conveyed in the last schedule. You are now instructed to proceed with the sale of one of the ships. Let her be sold as she stands on arriving in port with so much of the cargo as belongs to your house. My lord is urgently pressed for money, and begs that there may be no delay. Meantime send a draft by the usual channel for money in hand.

'Your obedient servants,

'Bisse and Son.'

'A draft for moneys in hand!' cried the manager. 'There are no moneys in hand! And I have to sell without delay a tall ship, cargo and all, as she stands. Without delay! Who is to buy that ship—without delay?'

I returned him the letter and shook my head. My ship, perhaps, was the one to be sold. She was the latest arrival; she was filled with wine; the cargo belonged altogether to the house. So I should be turned adrift when just within hail, so to speak, of becoming a captain. I could say nothing in consolation or in hope. I walked away, my heart as heavy as lead. Never before had I felt the true meaning of this ruin and waste. All around me the noble edifice built by Molly's grandfather and her father, and continued by her guardian, had been pulled down bit by bit. But one felt the loss of a farm or a house very little. It was not until the ships, too, were threatened, that the full enormity of the thing—the incredible wickedness of the conspirators, was borne in upon my mind. It threatened to ruin me, you see, as well as Molly.

Therefore, I walked across the Market Place to the 'Crown' more gloomy in my mind than I can describe. Hitherto, somehow, a ship seemed safe; no one would interfere with a ship; like Lord Fylingdale himself, I was ready to ask whether a ship could be bought and sold. That is to say, I knew that she was often bought and sold, but I never thought that any of Molly's ships—any other ships as much as you please, but not Molly's ships—could be brought to the hammer.

The lady sent word that she would receive me. Imagine my surprise! She was none other than the Lady Anastasia. She was greatly changed in six months. I had seen her last, you remember, in January, when I met her in the Park. She was then finely dressed, and appeared in good

case, what we call a buxom widow—in other words, a handsome woman, with a winning manner and a smiling face. This was when I met her. When I left her on that occasion she was a handsome woman marred with a consuming wrath.

Now, I should hardly have known her. She was plainly attired, without patches or paint, wearing a grey silk dress. But the chief change was not in her dress, but in her face. She was pale, and her cheeks were haggard. She looked like a woman who had recently suffered a severe illness, and was, indeed, not yet fully recovered.

'Jack,' she advanced, giving me her hand with her old graciousness, 'you are very good to come when I call. It is the last time that you will obey any call from me.'

'Why the last time, madam?'

'Because, Jack, I am now going to make you my bitter enemy. Yes, my enemy for life.' She tried to smile, but her eyes grew humid. 'I can never be regarded henceforth as anything else. You will despise me—you will curse me. Yet I must needs speak.'

'Madam, I protest—I know not what you mean.'

'And I, Jack, I protest—I know not how to begin. Do you remember last January, when we talked together? Let me begin there. Yes; it will be best to begin there. I do not think I could begin at the other end. It would be like a bath of ice-cold water in January.'

'I remember our conversation, madam.'

'You told me—what was it you told me? Something about a certain box, or case of jewels.'

'Molly's jewels. Yes, I told you how his Lordship seized upon them at the first when he claimed control over Molly's fortune.'

'You told me that. It was in January. He had seized upon them six months before. The thing surprised me.

He had always told me that he could not get those jewels, and, Jack, you see, they were my own.'

'Yours, madam? But—they were Molly's.'

'Not at all. Molly, after her marriage, had nothing. All became my Lord's property. The jewels were mine, Jack—mine by promise and compact.'

I understood nothing.

'I have seen in France the women kneeling at the boxes where they confess to the priest. Jack, will you be my priest? I can confess to you what I could never confess to Molly—though I have wronged her—Jack! Oh! my priest——' Here she fell on her knees and clasped her hands. 'No—no,' she cried. 'I will not rise. On my knees, on my knees—not to ask your pardon, but for the shame and the disgrace and the villainy.'

'Madam—I pray—I entreat.'

I took her by both hands. I half lifted her and half assisted her. She sank into an armchair sobbing and crying, and covered her face with her hands. She was not play-acting. No—no—it was real sorrow—true shame. Oh! there was revenge as well. No doubt there was revenge. If she had been wicked, she had also been wronged. Presently she recovered a little. Then she sat up and began to talk.

'I am the most miserable woman in the world—and I deserve my misery. Jack, when you go back to your ship, fall on your knees and thank God that you are poor and that Molly has been robbed of her fortune and is also poor. Oh! to be born rich—believe me—it is a thing most terrible. It makes men become like Lord Fylingdale, who have nothing to do but to follow pleasure—such pleasure! Ah! merciful Heaven! such pleasure! And it makes women, Jack, like me. We, too, follow pleasure like the men—we become gamblers—there is no pleasure

for me like the pleasure of gambling; we fall in love for the pleasure and whim of it—till we are slaves to men who treat us worse than they treat their dogs—worse than they treat their lackeys. Then we forget honour and honesty; then we throw away reputation and good name; we accept recklessly shame and dishonour. My name has become a byword—but what of that? I have been a man's slave—I have done his bidding.'

'But how, madam'—still I understood very little of this talk, yet became suspicious when she spoke thus of the jewels—'how came Molly's jewels to be your own?'

'I tell you, Jack. By promise and compact. I must go back to another discourse with you. It was on a certain evening a year ago. You had made the fine discovery that Lord Fylingdale was a gamester and the rest of it. You told me. You also told me that Molly would not keep her promise, and would certainly not be at the church in the morning. Do you remember?'

'I remember that we talked about things.'

'We did. Go back a month or two earlier. By a most monstrous deception I was brought here. I was told first that it was in order to further some political object, which I did not believe; next, to help him in getting the command of this money—some women, I said, easily lose their sense of honour and of truth when they want to please their lovers. As for marriage, he declared for the hundredth time that there was but one woman in all the world whom he would marry—myself. Now do you understand? He had deceived me. Very well, then I would deceive him. At first my purpose was to await in the church the coming of the bride and expose the character of the man. Since she was not coming I would take her place.'

'What? It was you, then—you—you?'

'Yes, Jack. I was the woman you saw at the rails. I had a pink silk cloak like that of Molly; I am about the same height as Molly. I wore a domino as had been arranged. You took me for Molly.'

'But—if you were the bride——'

'I was the bride. I am the Countess of Fylingdale—for my sins and sorrows—his wretched wife.'

'But you would be revenged, and yet you suffered this monstrous fraud?'

'I was revenged. Yet—why did I say nothing? Did I not say that you could never forgive me? Well, I have no excuse, only, as I said, women like me, with nothing to do, sometimes go mad after a man and for his sake cast away honour and care nothing for shame and ill-repute. I say, Jack,' she repeated earnestly, 'that I make no excuse—I tell you nothing but the plain truth. Lord! how ugly it is!'

I said nothing, I only stood still waiting for more.

'When I took off my domino in the vestry, my Lord, with the man Purdon only being present, was like a madman. That I expected. After raging for a while and crying out that he was now ruined indeed, and after cursing Mr. Purdon for not destroying the registers, he listened to Mr. Purdon's advice that we should consider a way out of it. Accordingly, in my lodgings, the man Purdon, who is the greatest inventor and encourager of every evil thing that lives, set forth the ease with which this marriage could be claimed, unless there was any obstacle such as sudden illness which might be proved to have made Molly's presence impossible. In other words, we were to assure the unfortunate Molly that she was already married, and we were to act as if that was the fact. We ascertained without trouble that she had not left the house that morning. How? We sent the music to congratulate the bride,

and the Captain sallied forth in his wrath and drove them off.'

'And to this you consented, out of your passion for the man?'

'Partly. There is always more than one reason for a woman's action. In this case there was a bribe. I confess that I have always ardently desired jewels. I cannot have too many jewels. He promised, Jack, that I should have them all. Perhaps—I do not know—the promise of the jewels decided me. Oh, Jack, they were wonderful! No such bribe was ever offered to a woman before.'

I gazed upon her with amazement. Truly, an explanation complete! Yet what a confession for a proud woman to make! Love that made her trample on honour and truth and virtue, and a bribe to quicken her footsteps!

'And now,' I said, 'you are willing to make this story public?'

'I have thought about the business a good deal. It has caused me more annoyance than you would believe.' ('Annoyance'! She spoke of 'annoyance'!) 'Besides, I have been cruelly abused. I have been the cause of that poor girl losing a great part—perhaps the whole—of her fortune. I have been robbed of the jewels. He swore to me a dozen times that he has never had them. I may by tardy confession save something from the wreck for that poor girl. He has wronged me in every way—in ways that no woman will, or can, forgive. I revenge my wrongs by making him a beggar a few weeks or months before he can come to the end of his money.'

So in this distracted way she talked, till one could not tell whether she was most moved by the thought of revenge or by pity for Molly, or by a wholesome repentance of her sin.

'Jack,' she said, 'your honest face is pulled out as long

as my arm. I could laugh if I were not so miserable. Tell me what I should do next. Mind, I will do exactly what you bid me do. I have lived so long among kites, hawks, crows, and birds of prey, with foul creatures and crawling reptiles, that merely to talk to an honest man softens and subdues me. Take me in the humour, Jack. To-morrow, or next day, should the idea of the man possess my soul again, if he should stand over me and take my hand, I know not—I know not what would happen. Perhaps, even for Molly's sake, I could not resist him. I am but a poor, weak, miserable woman. And he has led me hither, and sent me thither, and made me his slave so long, that he has become part of my life. Quick, then, Jack! Tell me what to do.'

'Come with me,' I said.

So she wrapped herself in a long cloak—not of pink silk—and she put on a domino, and I led her to Mr. Redman's office. And here I begged her to let me set down in writing what she had told me, but in fewer words; while Mr. Redman stood over me and read what I wrote and as I wrote it.

'The story, your ladyship,' he said, 'is the most remarkable that I have ever heard. You will now sign it before witnesses—my clerk and one whom he will bring from the Custom House will serve. So—they will sign without knowing what the paper contains.'

So she signed in the same bold running hand that we had seen in the registers.

'What next?' she asked.

'Why, madam, we have to consider the next step. It is obvious that the confession removes the whole of the difficulty, and explains what has hitherto seemed inexplicable. How, it was asked, could the place of the bride be filled at the last moment, and without previous knowledge that

it would have to be filled? And who was the woman thus duly married and actually, though under a false name, made Countess of Fylingdale, who did not step forward and claim her rights? Now, madam, the question is answered. You knew, but my Lord did not know, that the bride would not come to the church. You were there, therefore, to take her place. You joined in this conspiracy, and kept silence for the reasons contained in this document.'

'Quite so. And now, sir, what next? Will you bring my Lord to justice? Shall I have to give evidence against him?'

'Madam, I know not. You have done your best, not so much to repair a great wrong as to stop further wrong. If I understand matters aright it will be impossible to recover anything that has been taken.'

'You might as well hope to recover a sack of coals that have been burned.'

'Therefore, what we have to do first, is to stop further pillage. Next, I apprehend, we must make it clear that your signature in the register was false.'

Lady Anastasia rose and put on her domino again.

'I am going back to London, sir. Mr. Pentecrosse knows my house where I am to be heard of for the present. It was a bad day's work when I was married in that pink silk cloak. It may prove a worse day's work when I confessed.'

'Nay, madam,' I said quietly, 'can it be a bad day's work to stop a cruel and unfeeling robbery?'

'I have done my part, gentlemen, for good or for ill. In a few weeks or months the man would have beggared himself as well as that poor girl. Now he is beggared already. I know not what he will do, nor whither he will turn.'

So I led her back to the 'Crown,' and that same day she

took her departure and I have never seen her since. One letter, it is true, I had from her of which I will tell you in due course.

Then I returned to Mr. Redman.

'Jack,' he said, 'I am going without further discussion to warn the manager not to send any more money to these attorneys and to disregard their orders. I shall write at once warning them that we have now in our hands clear proof that my client is not married to Lord Fylingdale, and that we are considering in what manner we should proceed with regard to the large sums that have been remitted to his orders. This, Jack, is the way of lawyers. We write such a letter knowing that we shall not proceed further in this direction, for the scandal would be very great and the profit would be very small. Besides, there is the awkward fact that we made no protest, but submitted. Yet sure and certain I am that the other side will not dare to go into court, being conscious of guilt, yet not knowing how much we have learned.'

'It seems a tame ending that villainy should get off unpunished.'

'Not unpunished, Jack. You young men look to see the lightning strike the wicked man. That is not the way, believe me. He never goes unpunished, though he may be forgiven. I look not for the flash of lightning to strike this man dead, but I look for the vengeance of the Lord—perhaps to-day, perhaps to-morrow.'

He read over again the paper signed by Lady Anastasia. 'It is a strange confession,' he said. 'There is the wrath of a jealous woman in it. He might have beaten her and cuffed her; he might have robbed her; and she would have forgiven him. But he has followed after strange goddesses. She spoke about the jewels. I suppose that he has long since given them to these strange goddesses.

Hence her repentance. Hence her revenge. Jack, I think we ought to have the other confederate's confession—that of the man Purdon. He wanted £12,000 for it at first. He then came down to £6,000; he now offers it for relief of his present necessities. I will send my attorney to see him. The Vicar refuses to have any dealings with scoundrels. In this case, however, it might be politic to traffic with him. We will offer him £100 for a full confession. I will instruct my attorney what particulars to expect.'

My story is nearly finished. Molly recovered her freedom with the loss of by far the greater part of her fortune. She had, indeed, nothing left except her fleet and the trade carried on by the firm in which she was sole partner. Still she remained the richest woman in the town.

There was no difficulty in procuring from the Reverend Mr. Purdon a full statement of the conspiracy. It was, of course, to be expected that he should represent Lord Fylingdale as the contriver and the proposer of the abominable design. However, he gave under safeguards of witness and signature a plain recital of what had happened, in which he was borne out by the other confession in our hands.

And here follows the letter from the Lady Anastasia.

'My dear Jack,' she said,

'News reaches Lynn slowly if it gets there at all. Therefore I hasten to inform you that an end has come—perhaps the end that you would desire. My Lord is no more. I am a widow. Yet I mourn not. My husband in name during the last twelve months has acted as one no longer in command of himself. I cannot think, indeed, that he has been in his right mind since he entered upon that great crime of which you know. He would have gone

from bad to worse, and I should have suffered more and still more. He killed himself. He placed the muzzle of a pistol within his mouth and so killed himself.

'It was yesterday. I went to see him. I had to tell him what I had done. I expected he would kill me. Perhaps it would have been better had he done so.

'I found him with his attorney, a man named Bisse, whom I have seen with him frequently.

'"Pray, madam, take a chair. I am your humble servant. You can go, Mr. Bisse," said my Lord. "You have my instructions. Order the manager to proceed with the sale of the ships."

'"With submission, my Lord. We can send him orders, but we can only make him obey by proceeding according to law. He finds excuses. He makes delays. He talks of sacrificing the ships to a forced sale."

'"You will not proceed according to law, my Lord," I told him.

'"Why, madam?"

'"Because I have been to Lynn myself, and have explained certain points in connection with the marriage service in St. Nicholas' Church."

'My Lord looked at me in his cold way, as if neither surprised nor moved.

'"Mr. Bisse," he said, "I will communicate again with you." So the attorney left us. Then he turned again to me.

'"My Lord," I repeated, "I have made a statement of all the facts."

'"I thank you, madam. I thank you with all my heart. Let me not detain you."

'He said no more, and I rose. But the door was thrown open, and Mr. Purdon walked in without being announced.

'"Ha!" he said, seeing me, "we are all three, then, together again. My Lord, I will not waste your time. I have come to explain that since you have refused to perform your compact, you cannot complain if I have broken up the whole business."

'"I thought I had ordered you out of my presence, sir."

'"So you did. So you did. I have only come to say that I have this day drawn up a full confession of the conspiracy into which I was drawn by your Lordship, deceived against my better judgment by the promise of a large sum of money.'

'Lord Fylingdale pointed to the door. "You can go, sir," he said. So the man Purdon obeyed and went away.

'Then he turned to me. "Anastasia, we were friends once. I treated you shamefully in the matter of the jewels. Things have gone badly with me of late. I seem to have no luck. Perhaps I have, somehow, lost my judgment. That money has done me no good. Curse that scoundrel, Sam Semple! It is all over now. The game has been played. I have lost, I suppose. But every game comes to an end at last." He talked unlike himself. "You can go, Anastasia. You had better leave me. You have had your revenge. Let that consideration console you."

'I said no more, but left him. It was in the afternoon. An hour later his people heard an explosion—they ran to find the cause. Lord Fylingdale was lying dead on the floor.

'So, Jack, we are all punished, and none of us can complain. For my own part, I am going into the country, where I have a small dower-house. The solitude and the dulness will, I dare say, kill me, but I do not care about living any longer.

'ANASTASIA.'

She did, however, pass into a better mind. For I heard some time after that she had married the Dean of the neighbouring cathedral, not under the name of Lady Fylingdale, which she never assumed, but under that of her first husband.

As to the other confederates, the Poet, the Colonel, and the Parson, I never heard anything more about them. Nor do I expect now that I ever shall.

The rest of Molly's history, dear reader, belongs to me, and not to the world.

THE END

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